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**The Translation and Domestication of an
Oriental Religion into a Western Catholic
Country:**

The Case of Soka Gakkai in Italy

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in Translation Studies

University of Warwick, Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural
Studies

October 2007

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Lynne Long for her invaluable support and her constant attention. She taught me independence and freedom, and gave me strength and confidence.

I am also very grateful to my friends Loredana Polezzi, Paola Toninato and Ilaria Dal Brun, who generously shared their knowledge with me, and were always there to provide comfort and support.

Special thanks to “Lord Brady”, at first a nickname on the Web who in time became a precious friend.

I should like to acknowledge a generous grant from the AHRC which enabled me to conduct and complete this dissertation.

Finally, all my gratitude goes to my husband Riccardo, for his constant love and encouragement.

And to Michael McDonald, who started it all.

Declaration of Material Presented Elsewhere

Part of chapter 4 and 5 was presented at the conference *Writing Back in/and Translation*, Umeå University, Sweden, 6-7 November 2003, under the title “Buddhists and Catholics: the Question of National Identity in Italy”; at the ACUME conference *Cultural Memory*, University of Warwick, 14 June 2003, and then published under the title “Italian Religious Memory” in Cristina Marinetti (ed.), *Translation, Memory and Culture*, Warwick Working Papers in Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies, Warwick: Warwick UP, 2004. Part of Chapter 5 was published under the title “When East meets West via Translation” in Lynne Long (ed.) *Translation and Religion: Holy Untranslatable?*, Clevedon, Buffalo and Toronto: Multilingual Matters, 2005. It was also presented at the XXVIII Conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion, Zagreb, Croatia, July 18-22 2005 under the title “Breaking Boundaries: the Translation of an Oriental Religion into a Western Catholic Country”. Part of Chapter 1 was presented at the conference *Between and Between II: Memory and Cultural Translation*, Queen’s University, Belfast, 18-21 April 2006, under the title “Giambattista Vico’s *The New Science*: a possible Paradigm for Translation”.

References and Bibliography

The MHRA Style Guide (2002) has been followed for references and bibliography.

List of Abbreviations (in alphabetical order)

AINS	Associazione Italiana Nichiren Shoshu
BS	<i>Buddismo e Società</i>
IBISG	Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai
ISG	Istituto Soka Gakkai
NR	<i>Il Nuovo Rinascimento</i>
NRM	New Religious Movement
SG	Soka Gakkai
SGI	Soka Gakkai International
WND	<i>The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin</i>

Note

All translation from Italian into English are my own, unless otherwise specified.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is premised on the fundamental notion of religious translation as a process of interpretation and adaptation that arises out of a complex linguistic and cultural interplay. Its aim is to examine the types of interpretative problems one encounters as a society deeply rooted in Biblical and Christian practices struggles to integrate the rituals and formulae of Buddhism. As part of a cultural system, the translation of a religion cannot be explored in a vacuum, but needs to be viewed in the mutual interdependence with other elements of such system. Starting from Giambattista Vico's hypothesis that "whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand" (1744) this thesis aims to look at the interplay of local and foreign traditions in the translation and domestication of a Japanese new religious movement, Soka Gakkai, that has migrated from East to West.

Through the notion of "cultural repertoire", i.e. the aggregate of options utilized by a group of people for the organization of life", this work explores the extent in which Catholicism in Italy has influenced the formation of both religious sense and religious vocabulary. It will be argued that in Italy, the translation of an entire set of Japanese key-concepts pertaining to the sphere of religion has been measured on the yardstick of Christian vocabulary, and thus influenced by the search of "perfect equivalences". This operation has, in time, secured the successful dissemination of Soka Gakkai in the territory. At the same time, however, the overlap of Catholic and Buddhists practices has given rise to a peculiar form of hybrid religion that can be defined as "Catho-Buddhism."

INTRODUCTION

For Italian followers of the Buddhist religious school Soka Gakkai (SG), the dawn of the Third Millennium was of strong symbolic significance. According to their Japanese leader, the Twenty-First Century inaugurated the beginning of a new era in which “True Buddhism” would unfailingly spread “Peace, Culture and Education”¹ throughout the world and eventually replace all other “distorted” religions that, far from improving humankind, had left it mired in violence and unhappiness.

Ever since his first visit to Europe in 1961, Daisaku Ikeda, SG’s president, has suggested that Italy has something of a *missione civilizzatrice* to introduce Soka Gakkai’s Buddhism throughout Europe. Almost since the establishment of the movement in the peninsula, hearty prayers have been chanted in every Italian SG household, to express gratitude for the exceptional good fortune that the Buddha had bestowed upon Italy. At the same time, no efforts were spared to win new converts to the cause of *kosen rufu*, a Japanese word that – although literally meaning “universal propagation” - Italian Soka Gakkai translates as “peace in the world”.² In this light, it is little wonder that by the end of 1999, of the 38,000 Soka Gakkai members active in Europe, over half were Italians (Dobbelaere, 1998: 2).

¹ The slogan “Peace, Culture, and Education” functions as a *motto universalis* for Soka Gakkai and is repeated at every public meeting and reprinted on the front page of every SG publication.

² In the interpretation of the Japanese Buddhist monk Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282), founder of the Buddhist tradition from which modern Soka Gakkai stems, the concept of *kosen rufu* refers in particular to the universal propagation of his teachings (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation).

To celebrate the blessings the new Millennium would bring, Ikeda dedicated a long poem to the movement's "beloved Italian disciples", urging them to work even harder in spreading Buddhism:

Vincete col coraggio!
 Vincete con la perseveranza!
 Vincete con l'unità!
 Vincete con la sincerità!
 Vincete con la convinzione!³

To that end, Italian Soka Gakkai's leaders undertook the ambitious goal of increasing the number of their adherents by 50 percent.⁴ Thus, they planned a massive campaign of *shakubuku* (conversion) and urged their members — whom they celebrated as "pioneers of a religious movement" that would enable Europe, and, in time, the entire world "to erase unhappiness and wars"⁵ — to devote their lives to the propagation of their faith in the mantra *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*.

As it happened, these efforts to win new converts proved successful, so much so that today, with a total number of 35,000 members, Soka Gakkai is the strongest New Religious Movement of non-Judeo-Christian roots in Italy (Introvigne and Zoccatelli, 2006: 662). And, although it was first introduced into the country as an Oriental "philosophy" encouraging an alternative way of living, SG's legal status has shifted so that it is now

³ Daisaku Ikeda, "Il nuovo brillante secolo dell'Italia": the complete poem can be found at <http://www.sgi-italia.org/biblioteca/poema_2002-10-19-pdf>.

⁴ The slogan "Trentamila nel Duemila" was launched in 1999 through a series of meetings in all Italian major cities (see also Chapter 5 of this dissertation).

⁵ References to the pioneering role of Italy recur in almost all Daisaku Ikeda's speeches addressed to Italian members. See for instance: Daisaku Ikeda. "Le mie speranze per il futuro", in *Il Nuovo Rinascimento Notizie* (supplement to *Il Nuovo Rinascimento*, June 2000), p.1.

officially recognised as a *religione*, a designation that places it in direct competition with the Roman Catholic Church.

What is Soka Gakkai?

The doctrinal basis on which the Soka Gakkai movement rests is a blend of several elements. The basic source is the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282), a Japanese monk who, having studied the Sutras of Shakyamuni Buddha via translation from Chinese, came to believe that the Lotus Sutra was the highest, and the only valid, Buddhist scripture. That is, he associated the creed that the Buddha-nature is immanent in every aspect of reality and intrinsic to every living creature with the Lotus Sutra. Faith in this Sutra, he wrote, is the only effective means of salvation in an age (the Latter Day of the Law, or *Mappo*), in which the authentic teachings of the Buddha have fallen into general decay (Murata, 1969: 19).

Nichiren introduced several novel elements into Buddhism. The first is the *Gohonzon*, or object of worship, a *mandala* of symbolic representation of the universal, eternal Buddha inscribed by Nichiren himself. The second is the *daimoku*, the invocation of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. Nichiren taught that one who believes in and chants *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* to the *Gohonzon* will definitely attain the same life condition of Buddhahood as he himself possesses.

But these doctrinal aspects could not alone account for the enormous popularity that this religion achieved worldwide following the conclusion of the Second World War. Until the beginning of the last century, in fact, the doctrine was confined to Japan and restricted to the various temples established by a number of sects that grew after the death of

Nichiren. For a strong organisation to be built, it was necessary to wait until a series of three outstanding figures assumed a strong leadership role both in spreading Nichiren's teachings and in gathering around them adepts from all social strata. The turning point occurred in the 1930s, when the scholar and teacher Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), dissatisfied with the prevalent educational approaches, elaborated a pedagogical system based on the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creation Academic Society).

The religious core of SG's ideology was reinterpreted and adapted for the masses by its second president, Josei Toda (1900-1958), who was determined to spread the organisation throughout Japanese society. In Japan, Soka Gakkai has frequently been the subject of severe criticism. Its exclusivity, its use of the recruiting method of *shakubuku* (literally "to break and subdue"), and its critical attitude toward other religions have given rise to distrust and opposition. More criticism arose when the movement entered the Japanese political arena through the Komeito Party, established in 1964.

In 1960, Daisaku Ikeda (1928-) became Soka Gakkai's third president. Under his charismatic leadership, the movement rapidly increased its members in Japan and began its expansion overseas. In 1971, Ikeda created the Soka Gakkai International of which he is the sole president and leader. Ikeda succeeded in the task of simplifying Nichiren's doctrine, thereby rendering it more palatable and appealing to a Western audience. During this process of cultural translation, the international organisation became more and more centred on the cult of Ikeda's personality: Ikeda's writings are considered equal to the teachings of Nichiren himself and are similarly viewed as official repositories of truth.

Since its foundation, Soka Gakkai had functioned as the lay branch of the Nichiren Shoshu, one of the many religious schools stemmed from Nichiren's tradition. As a religious body, Nichiren Shoshu provided the movement with its spiritual legitimacy. In

turn, Soka Gakkai, with its large membership, provided the priesthood with lay believers and funds deriving from *zaimu* (donations). Years of conflicts between the clerical and the lay side culminated in 1991 with the separation between Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai, which today claims to be sole religious movement to have inherited the purity of Nichiren's teachings.

The Context: Italy as a “Catholic Country”

The Buddhist movement of Soka Gakkai is international in scope, and is among the fastest growing new religious groups at work around the world today. Its dissemination has attracted scholarly interest worldwide (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994; Hammond and Machacek, 1999; Machacek and Wilson, 2000). The case of Italy, which has traditionally been considered the Catholic country par excellence, is particularly worth considering in this context inasmuch as Eastern religions have found a surprisingly receptive public for growth in recent years, and for the first time in their history Italians have abandoned the Church in large numbers to convert to foreign religions having nothing to do with traditional Christian beliefs (Bergonzi, 1980; Macioti, 1996).

At present, Italy is undergoing a fascinating and crucial evolution with respect to its basic cultural identity. As a relatively new centralized State (established only in 1861), Italy has had to deal repeatedly with questions of national identity, that were strongly advocated by its various national governing bodies but poorly accepted by its population. Today,

nearly 150 years post-unification, the issue of “what makes Italians Italians” remains in play.⁶

This dissertation will repeatedly examine the notion of Italian identity as it explores how, throughout the centuries, it has been rooted in a deeply religious background, which transcended regional realities and thus enabled the people to develop a sense of belonging to a larger abstract entity known as Italy. At least since the Middle Ages, in fact, the clash of rival dynasties, external dominations, and competing City-states worked to fragment every conceivable sense of a larger, national identity (Cavalli, 1998). In this context, religious tradition has always provided the necessary cohesive glue to hold together an otherwise fragmented country marked by profound differences in regional cultures as well as by the seemingly irremediable economic gap between North and South. Until quite recently, the Roman Catholic Church – together with its closely allied political party, the *Democrazia Cristiana* – provided the cultural yardstick against which every Italian measured him – or herself, whether by accepting and acting upon the religious values insisted upon by the Church, or by rejecting and opposing them.

In such a highly polarised context, Italians are wont to view the word “religion” as a thinly veiled synonym for Catholicism. Down through the centuries in fact, Catholicism has provided a diffused set of beliefs that has pervaded virtually all sectors of Italian social life. It is a dominance that maintains its influence over common values to this day. This cluster of common values tends to unify behaviours and attitudes deriving from both the religious and lay perspectives. It provides a sort of popular ethos, a manifestation of the spiritual force of the Italian community, that creates, protects and transmits the ethical and aesthetic models of everyday life. The binding power of religion is also demonstrated, beyond

⁶ The conceptualisation of “Italian identity” has been widely discussed. Among the major works see: De Mauro (1987); Ginsborg (1994); Romano (1994); Galli della Loggia (1998).

national boundaries, by the strong sense of community present among Italian emigrants. Beyond all political, social and cultural division, Italians recognise themselves as a community by sharing symbols and rituals that arise out of a Catholic matrix. This is evident in the celebration of rites of passage, such as birth, marriage, death, and in all forms of family interaction.

Religious Encounters

Since the fall of the Roman Empire, the Italian peninsula has suffered from political and economical weaknesses that have prevented it from matching the imperialist might of other European nations (Romano, 1994). Religion seemed to be the only important site of negotiation to gain international power and visibility. In the course of its religious colonisation, Italy has exported its beliefs and its religious metaphors to the four corners of the world. Relying on the assumption that there could be no truth outside the Roman Church, Catholicism has made every effort both to fight against the Reformation that spread through Europe after the Sixteenth Century and to assure its domination over the “pagan” East.⁷

In recent times, the flow of religious expansion, traditionally seen in Italy as having its source in Rome and moving outwards from there, seems to have been reversed, and religions such as Buddhism are striking back from the periphery to directly confront the

⁷The Counter-Reformation devoted particular care to the diffusion of Christianity in the most remote countries. Thanks to the establishment of missionary orders overseas, the study of Orientalism was inaugurated leading to the compilation of the first Oriental language dictionaries and the birth of Oriental philology. (See Giuseppe Tucci (1949) *Italia e Oriente*. Milano: Garzanti).

core identity of Christian Italy. This study into the penetration of Soka Gakkai in Italy will seek to describe the cultural and linguistic short-circuit generated by the introduction of a peculiar Oriental repertoire of beliefs, styles, values and symbols that have overlapped with the practices and the religious terminology of Catholicism.

Statement of Purpose

This dissertation is an attempt to apply theories and hypotheses that have shaped the growth of Translation Studies and to use them to understand both the success of the Japanese Buddhist organisation Soka Gakkai in Italy and the consequences of the encounter and interaction of two different religious systems, namely Buddhism and Catholicism. At first, this issue might appear as the object of studies of other disciplines, such as sociolinguistics, sociology of religion and religious studies. Indeed, through these disciplines scholars have examined the movement's history (Métraux, 1988), its religious tenets (Murata, 1969), its efforts at winning new converts (White, 1970), and the socio-economic status and views of its adherents both prior to and after conversion to its teachings (Macioti, 1996; Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1999).

But what of the ways in which Soka Gakkai's leadership has positioned its religious vocabulary in other cultures? What (if any) "cultural interference" (Even-Zohar, 2001) has the movement experienced as its religious repertoire of beliefs has been absorbed and domesticated by the target countries into which the Soka Gakkai leadership has deliberately chosen to seek new adherents? And what aspects of the Soka Gakkai's religious teachings have been lost or modified as a result of this process of translation?

Broadly considered, the word “translation”, in its etymological meaning of “carrying across”⁸ fully comprehends the idea of “cultural transfers” of religious doctrine from one part of the globe to another. With this at my starting point, I will, in the pages that follow, analyse how the adherents of one strand of Buddhism have translated their Japanese doctrine, with its wealth of exotic rituals and oriental traditions, into a particular Western country, Italy, with a decidedly different religious heritage. At the same time, this dissertation will explore how, and through what process, Italian converts to Buddhism have absorbed and domesticated the new religion according to their pre-existent categories of “what a religion should be”. Like all pioneers in an “alien” land, in fact, Italians exploring Buddhism brought with them their own cultural assumptions, and started their journey with an embedded idea of *religione*, their domestic tradition functioning as the yardstick against which to measure the religious otherness in the search for perfect “equivalences”.

The notion of “equivalence” is a central concept in Translation Studies theory, and has been general understood as “accuracy”, “correspondence”, “fidelity” to a source text. J.C. Catford (1965: 20) conceptualised the notion of “formal” equivalence, underlining the importance for the vocabulary in the target culture to be constantly compared with the message contained in the source culture. Eugene Nida (1964/2000: 129) has offered the definition of “dynamic” equivalence, based on the principle of “equivalent effect”, which “does not insist that [the receptor] understands the cultural patterns of the source-language context to comprehend the message” (Ibid.). In this light, the Japanese term *shukyo* could indeed find a certain degree of equivalence with the Italian *religione*. The act of translation, however, takes place between cultures, and different cultural contexts influence the way in

⁸ The Latin *translatio* derives from the perfect passive participle, *translatus*, of the verb *transferre* ,“to transfer” from *trans* (across) and *ferre* (“to carry”, or to “bring”). The modern Romance, Germanic and Slavic European languages have generally formed their own equivalent terms for this concept after the Latin model, *transferre*, or after the kindred *traducere*, “to lead across”.

which a text, or even a single word, is received: “translation as an activity is always doubly contextualised, since the text has a place in two cultures” (Bassnett/Lefevere, 1990: 11).

As this dissertation will illustrate, the translation of Buddhist religious tenets and vocabulary in Italy has had to confront the impasse of the “linguistic advantage of Catholicism” which, relying on Latin etymologies, has formed Italian’s *sensus communis* (Vico, 1774) and functions as a *tertium comparationis* which seems to challenge every possibility of translatability. This study is in accord with George Steiner’s basic premise that translation is a part of everyday communication: “to understand is to decipher. To hear significance is to translate” (1998: xii). Steiner’s hermeneutic approach⁹, which requires that we question what it actually means “to understand” any oral or written speech, is important when analysing the introduction of a foreign religion into a target cultural repertoire which is already occupied by a pre-existent religious canon, and its vocabulary its already loaded with domestic indigenous referents. Also important is Steiner’s insistence that all texts are “translated” in the process of being used by one individual to communicate with another. In this context, a religion can be considered as a “text”, whose vocabulary, symbols and ritual practices need to be deciphered when transferred to a new country.

Two widely used reference points in Translation Studies are the notions of Source and Target, indicating a point of departure and a point of arrival in the translating process.

In this thesis, Soka Gakkai’s religion will be considered as the “source text” (ST), which originates in Japan and moves to Italy to become translated into a “target text” (TT) which is, in our case, the Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai. Soka Gakkai’s “text” is composed by a precise Japanese vocabulary pertaining to the sphere of the sacred, which needs to be translated into another language (intralingual translation, in Jakobson’s

⁹ Steiner advocates an hermeneutic approach to translation in Chapter 5 of his *After Babel* (1975/1998: 312-435).

definition)¹⁰, in the search for the “closest possible equivalent” (Nida, 1964/2000: 129). But it is also composed by a series of religious notions and ritual practices that have to be introduced and explained in the target (Italian) culture by means of metaphors and paraphrases (intralingual translation) which often rely on examples drawn from the domestic tradition.

In the 1970s Itamar Even-Zohar introduced the notion of polysystem.¹¹ According to this view, a text does not exist in isolation, but as a part of a multi-layered structure of elements which relate to and interact with each other. Central to the concept of polysystem is the idea that the various strata which make up a given polysystem are constantly competing with each other for the dominant position, generating a state of tension between the centre and the periphery. Although Even-Zohar’s model mainly refers to literary texts, it can be expanded to include all kind of texts: a religion, for instance, can be central in one culture’s system but marginal in another, as in the case of Italy, in which Catholicism is central and Buddhism has been long considered as a by-product of a more general orientation towards new-age practices and rituals (Introvigne and Zoccatelli, 2006: 577). The notion of polysystem is useful to understand the evolution of Soka Gakkai in Italy. As Even-Zohar (1990) observes, “the centre of the whole polysystem is identical with the most prestigious canonized repertoire” (17). At its first entrance into Italian religious culture, the

¹⁰ In his *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* (1959) Roman Jakobson introduces the notions of interlingual translation (or “translation proper”), intralingual translation (or “rewording”) and intersemiotic translation (or “transmutation”). As used in this dissertation, the categories of intralingual and interlingual translation will tend to overlap, since it is from the combination of these two elements that the transmission and the reception of a religion takes place.

¹¹ Itamar Even-Zohar introduced the idea of “polysystem” in a series of papers published in 1978: *Papers in Historical Poetics*. Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects. (See also: Itamar Even-Zohar (1990) *Polysystem Studies. Poetics Today*, 11: 1.). The polysystem theory was further elaborated on by Gideon Toury in *In Search of a Theory of Translation* (Tel Aviv: The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, 1980)

movement positioned itself at the most remote periphery of the system, and took the identity of a *filosofia*. Italian culture, in fact, based on a monotheistic approach to religion was not ready to understand the lack of Divinity proper to Buddhism, and could not accept it as a *religione* proper. In its successive move towards the centre of the system, Soka Gakkai slowly mutated its language and practice to take the form of the “canonized” religious model, i.e. that of the Roman Catholic Church.

Steiner describes the process of incorporating the ST into the TT culture as being somewhere between the poles of “complete domestication” and “permanent strangeness” (351). He also suggests that the importation of foreign texts can potentially dislocate or relocate the whole of the translated text structure – describing this in terms of “sacramental intake” or “infection” (315). To examine this process, the notions of Foreignisation and Domestication (introduced in Chapter 1 of this dissertation) are useful to highlight Soka Gakkai’s adaptive strategies to the Italian religious system, and to reveal the extent in which the process of total foreignisation in term of language and vocabulary has corresponded to a gradual domestication of Soka Gakkai’s religious identity. In this, the translation of Soka Gakkai’s “text” into the Italian culture can be seen as revealing a certain degree of manipulation.¹² The research by such scholars as André Lefevere (1992, 1995) and Susan Bassnett (1995) on ideological manipulation of translation provides us with insight to examine how Soka Gakkai has appropriated some of the ideological bases of the Roman Catholic Church for the construction of its “religious authority”.¹³ Translation, according to Lefevere (1992) is one important form of rewriting “originals”, it is a decision process which is influenced by certain ideological factors, resulting in various degrees of

¹² The work of the “Manipulation School” is defined by Theo Hermans (ed.) (1985) in the introduction to *The Manipulation of Literature. Studies in Literary Translation*. London, and Sydney: Croom Helm.

¹³ For the notion of religious authority, or “authority based on religious claims” (Waida, 1987: 2) see Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

manipulation. As Ben-Ari Nitsa (2000: 43) further elaborates, the ideological manipulation in translation can refer to “any interference with the text, be it cultural, religious, political or otherwise, imposing modifications that are not textual constraints, for the purpose of indoctrination”.

This dissertation seeks to demonstrate that the discipline of Translation Studies can offer a useful tool to analyse the impact of the introduction of a new religion into a pre-existent religious system, and can represent an interesting amplification of an interdisciplinary approach carried out under the more canonical disciplines mentioned above. In particular, the theoretical framework provided by the sociology of religion will be expanded to include translation theories to investigate the process of Soka Gakkai’s translation into the Italian language and culture, with the aim to demonstrate that SG’s presence in Italy needs to be understood not merely as a sociological phenomenon but as a process of interpreting and understanding against a backdrop of complex linguistic interplay with Roman Catholicism.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 introduces the sociological approach to the notion of “religion”, analysed through its substantive elements (what religion *is*) and its functional elements (what religion *does*). The metaphor of the “sacred canopy” (Berger, 1967) will be used to illustrate the process by which the traditional Western concept of religion has been transformed as modernity developed and globalisation introduced new forms of worldviews. Another metaphor, that of the “religious marketplace” (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985; 1987) will be used to emphasise the transnational flow of religious beliefs. In

globalised, multicultural societies, in fact, religious institutions compete for adherents, in a “market” that offers new forms of beliefs to satisfy all spiritual needs. The spreading of New Religious Movements (NRMs) is seen primarily as a result of the increasingly global character of the religious marketplace which allows the wider circulation of religious ideas. The term New Religious Movements has recently been introduced to indicate a wide variety of movements, such as the Church of Scientology, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Neo Pagan groups and Soka Gakkai (Barker, 1982). In the West, NRMs of Oriental traditions are particularly competitive as they offer a new cultural life-style and a level of engagement markedly different from that of traditional Church Christianity (Wilson, 1981: v).

With the rise of NRMs in the twentieth century scholars were challenged by the need to elaborate new definitions and to re-define their religious terminology. For some of these movements, in fact, the very definition of “religion” is highly problematic. As Lester Kurtz (1995: 6) underlines, Western analyses of religion rely on ideas elaborated by scholars living in a culture built on Judeo-Christian tradition. In Italy in particular, the word *religione* conveys a mixture of etymological, cultural and doctrinal features which resists translatability. The semantic reverberation of this one word, both considered from its etymological origins and from its long-standing synonym for Roman Catholic dogma renders it largely impermeable to any attempt to accommodate within its meaning references to alien practices and rituals. Thus, Chapter 1 draws on Translation Studies theories to discuss the notion of “equivalence” to highlight how, in religious matters, Italy still resents the supremacy of its own culture. Its historical connection with the Biblical language, in fact, is felt to be the first created “original”, thus influencing all interlingual information transfer. In the search for “equivalence”, Italians act as if the agent of *tertium*

comparationis was of divine nature, shifting every other religious language into a secondary position.

Chapter 2 introduces the “cultural and linguistic ‘other’”, namely Japan, where the basic notion of *shukyo* hardly finds any correspondence or “fidelity” to the Western concept of *religion*. In religious matters, Japan is the syncretic country par excellence, a country where Buddhism, Shintoism and folk beliefs have traditionally lived together and have merged to give rise to infinite forms of worship. Buddhism in particular, was born in India and reached the Far East via China and Korea. On its arrival in Japan, it had already absorbed some of the tenets of Chinese Confucianism, and then further modified itself under the influence of Shinto. The chapter traces the development of Japanese Buddhism, from its early identity of *shukyo* to its various branches of *shin shukyo*, new Buddhist sects stemming from the ancient tradition. Soka Gakkai arises out of just such a tradition, having its roots in the Thirteenth Century Hinyana Buddhism and then modernised and universalised by the re-elaboration of its three presidents: Tsunesaburu Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda.

Chapter 3 examines Soka Gakkai’s adaptive strategies in its move from East to West. Here it will be shown how the manipulation of the Buddhist concept of *zuiho bini* (“to follow the customs of the region”) provided a doctrinal justification for a dramatic change in Soka Gakkai’s rituals and precepts, in order for the movement to become more competitive in the Western religious market. The ideological replacement of the term *shakubuku* (to break and subdue) with a less aggressive method of conversion (*shoju*) eased the movement’s expansion outside Japan, and the “rewriting” of the concept of *Kosen rufu* as “propagation of world peace” firmly placed Soka Gakkai among the most popular Buddhist schools today. At the same time, this chapter explores how the extreme attention given to the centrality of its president and leader, Daisaku Ikeda, evolved into a personality

cult known as “Ikedaism” (Hurst, 2000). The creation of such a Charismatic Leader finds particular resonance in the Italian religious system, an issue that will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 introduces Italy as the host country in which Soka Gakkai has successfully disseminated its tenets. The metaphor of “religious marketplace” is here applied to the specific reality of Italian culture in order to underline the peripheral position that Buddhism was forced to occupy within a religious system already dominated by Catholic practices. Only after 1984, in fact, did Italian law grant equal status and dignity to religions of a non Judeo-Christian derivation. On their arrival in the Italian peninsula, Buddhist movements had to adjust their linguistic and ritual practices to match their legal status of “lay organisations”. This chapter will also challenge the traditional definition of Italy as a monolithic Catholic entity, to show how the gradual erosion of Church dominance has opened up possibilities for alternative forms of religion to be accommodated in the Italian religious system. As it will be suggested, however, Catholicism firmly remains in Italy as a form of “religious memory” which influences the translation and the adaptation of foreign religious practices. Lastly, this chapter will show how Soka Gakkai’s translation from *filosofia* to *religione* follows the route previously marked out by the Roman Catholic Church as it domesticated its own rituals in order to construct a solid “religious authority”.

Chapter 5 analyses the linguistic strategies enacted by Soka Gakkai to translate its vocabulary and religious concepts in Italy. Through a framework provided by sociolinguistics (Berruto, 1987) Soka Gakkai’s language will be examined in both its spoken and written dimensions. On the spoken level, in fact, Soka Gakkai’s translative strategies operate at the intralingual level of Italian/Italian, in the construction of a communicative register able to overcome the impasse of the Catholic lexicon already occupying the highest position of Italian religious vocabulary. On the written level, the

strategy is oriented towards the complete foreignisation of Buddhism, to preserve its tenets from contamination with the norms and expectations which Italians associate to their domestic (Catholic) religion. The high frequency of Japanese terms, however, has eventually given rise to a peculiar form of jargon known as “Buddese”. Among Soka Gakkai’s members, Buddese slowly took the form of “linguistic capital” (Bourdieu 1991) and became a source for power and status. Through the use of Buddese, Soka Gakkai’s leadership in Italy elaborated a vocabulary for religious propaganda, aimed at gathering mass consent. Here, the theory of the “Charismatic Leader” (Cavalli, 1998) will function as a means to construct a parallel between the language of Fascist “propaganda” (a term which, it may be worth noting, comes from religious practices) and the language of *shakubuku*.

* * *

The Insider/Outsider problem

This work was born from a personal interest on the language and practices of Soka Gakkai, a movement of which I have been a member since 1988 and for which I have worked occasionally as a translator. To borrow a term from ethnography, my position could be defined as that of “participant observation as an insider”. The insider/outsider problem in the study of faith has been widely discussed (Stringer, 2002) between those who argue that a researcher must be an insider, since only an insider can grasp a wider understanding of religious behaviours, and those who claim that an insider could not possibly hold a “truly” scientific position. When such a sensitive item as a religion is examined, however,

the notion of “scientific objectivity” is extremely difficult to categorise, as Eileen Barker explains in an article aptly entitled “Scientific Study of Religion: You Must Be Joking” (Barker, 1995). Notwithstanding the insider or outsider position of the observant, any documentation on the subject will result in what Elisabeth Arweck has defined as “contaminate writings” (Arweck, 2002: 117), writings that are influenced by the context in which they are produced, and by the position of the writer within that context. In terms of language and discursive practices, my insider position has allowed me to access to a repertoire of knowledge otherwise impossible to obtain.

Notice

This dissertation considers translation in its broader sense of “cultural transfer”, and aims at analysing how cultural Japanese references are carried over to Italian culture. Although Soka Gakkai is a movement of Japanese origins, its intentions toward global propagation are visible in the fact that all the material (discourses of president Ikeda, writings of Nichiren Daishonin) is purposely produced in the English language directly from a group of translators within the Japanese organisation itself, and then sent to foreign countries to be re-translated into their specific languages.

At one end, this procedure allows the material to spread easily and quickly among cultures which are not familiar with the Japanese language or which are not equipped with a suitable staff of translators. At the other end, it is evident that this procedure makes it difficult to have direct access to the original source.

This work does not deal (or only marginally does) with translation from the Japanese source language, and Japanese terminology will be confronted only to highlight

the difficulties in conveying religious concepts. The source language discussed in this thesis is English, English being the language in which all the material arrived in Italy and is subsequently translated into Italian. The technical effects of this practice of chain-translation are visible in the high number of anglicisms, calques, and neologisms which are easily detectable in Italian Buddhist parlance.

Terminology

In this work, the spelling of Japanese terms follows the editorial strategy of the Italian Soka Gakkai's publications, which does not make use of diacritic marks. Personal names are written according to the Western tradition, with the surname following the first name.

Unless otherwise specified, all references to Nichiren Buddhism, and to Soka Gakkai, will follow the use common to Italian members. Thus, the Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai (IBISG) becomes simply "Soka Gakkai", and Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is simply "Buddhism". In the same way, Daisaku Ikeda becomes "President Ikeda" or *Sensei*.

Italian Soka Gakkai members make extensive (and often unnecessary) use of Japanese terminology. One example for all is *zadankai* (discussion meeting) that corresponds to the Italian *riunione di discussione*. For the purpose of this work, the use of Japanese words will follow Italian tradition, and an English glossary is provided.

Other words, such as *Responsabile* or *Organizzazione* will remain in Italian marked with a capital letter to underline the fact that they are overcharged with meaning. In fact,

Organizzazione is the Soka Gakkai, and the *Responsabile* is the leader who embodies the power which emanated from it.

Limitations of Existing Literature

Although a vast amount of work exists on Soka Gakkai in general, very little can be found with regard to Italy. The only extensive study has been conducted by the sociologist Maria Immacolata Macioti at the University of Rome. The study covered a period of 3 years (1994-1997), and was published as *Il Budda che è in noi. Germogli del Sutra del Loto*. The journal *Critica Sociologica* has also published various contributions from Italian sociologists who in recent years have investigated the spread of Soka Gakkai into Italian society. No investigation so far has been conducted on the language used by Italian Buddhists in general or by Italian Soka Gakkai's adepts in particular.

Italian Soka Gakkai caught the attention of the media at the beginning of the 1990s, when it obtained legal recognition as "Ente Religioso" from the Italian State, with the subsequent possibility to claim large financial benefits from the State. At the same time, rumours about abusive behaviour of Soka Gakkai's leaders were occasionally reported by the press.

For the preparation of this dissertation, the main source of information has been Soka Gakkai official press, and in particular the monthly magazine *Il Nuovo Rinascimento*. Another valuable source of information has been personal attendance at *zadankai* (meetings) and other social events, although none of those could be recorded due to the strict policy of privacy in use within the Soka Gakkai.

A vast amount of information can be gathered from the Web. Besides Soka Gakkai's official web-sites, independent web-sites have been opened through the years all over the world. A list of the major sites is provided in the bibliography, with an indication of the contents, which span from auto-celebrative rhetoric, to the denunciation of abuses, or overt defamation.

The Web has also proved to be a vital medium of communication among Soka Gakkai members in the years 2000-2004, during what has been defined as the "battle between Talibans and Dissidents" (Macioti, 2002c). In particular, the mailing-list *Tracce2* gathered documentation about: the political links between Italian Soka Gakkai and Berlusconi's political party; irregularity in the use of financial assets; and the systematic recurrence of threats and intimidation against members. Political corruption is not the topic of this work, but the mailing list has been an important source of inspiration for the study of language. *Tracce2* is not open to public view, but the documents have been downloaded.

On October 14, 1995, the BBC-World News broadcast a TV programme entitled "The Chanting Millions". Although very critical of Soka Gakkai, it provides a fairly accurate, if basic, description of the movement's structure, beliefs and international activities, and for this reason its vision has been deemed functional to the scope of this dissertation. I have been unable to locate a video copy of the original BBC broadcast. However, a transcription of the programme does exist and is included in Appendix 1. I am also lodging, along with this dissertation, a French-language video of "The Chanting Millions" programme that was aired in France following the original BBC broadcast.

RELIGION AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: TERMINOLOGY

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed the revival of a phenomenon that lies at the roots of the world's religious history: religious syncretism, that is, the combination of elements from more than one religious tradition which results in the introduction of a novel “sacred canopy” into the cultural marketplace of religious beliefs. Syncretism itself is not new. All the world's religions were created over the centuries through a process of intercultural amalgamation and creative synthesis: “There are no gospels which are immortal” – Durkheim wrote - “but neither is there any reason for believing that humanity is incapable of inventing new ones” (1912/1968: 428). What is new about the current religious scene, however, is that it presents a dynamic interplay between indigenous religious practices on the one hand and, on the other, the widespread transplanting of experiments with sets of beliefs that were quite alien to most of mainstream religious traditions until fairly recently.¹

¹ In this dissertation, the term “mainstream” simply refers to those religions considered to be “prevailing” in a certain culture.

1.1. The Sacred Canopy²

In his seminal work *Religion in the Modern World: from Cathedrals to Cults* Steve Bruce (1996) provides the best summary of the process by which our concept of religion has been transformed and fragmented as modernity developed. Bruce defines the process as a move from “cathedrals to cults”, i.e. a move from the medieval idea of one dominant church and one dominant conception of God, typical of fifteenth century Europe, to the contemporary new forms of religious organisations, each of them competing to affirm their uniquely legitimate view of the truth. Whereas the people of the Middle Ages did what the Church told them God required, Bruce writes, the sovereign consumers of the modern world “pick and mix” their own religions (5).

According to Peter Berger (1969), religion and cultural traditions function to provide a “sacred canopy”, an overall, total explanation of human existence, to give meaning to an often confusing and chaotic world. In Berger’s view, religion is a matter of “world construction”, that is, it is an attempt to make sense of the universe: although our natural and social worlds are given to us when we are born into them, humans are also co-creators of their own world. Religion is at the core of the world-constructing process because it involves the highest level of the process: what a people hold as sacred (3). Berger suggests that the construction of the sacred canopy involves three basic elements: externalisation, objectivisation, and internalisation (4). The first element, externalisation, is simply the ongoing outpouring of human beings into the world around them, both physical and mental. In our daily lives, our thought and actions affect and shape the world in which we exist. In the second stage of the process, our

² The term is taken from Peter Berger’s book *The Social Reality of Religion* (1969), originally published as *The Sacred Canopy* (1967).

creations become objects external to us. This objectification means that after we project our creations onto the world, these creations confront us, as facts external to and separate from ourselves. Finally, in the third stage of world construction, we re-elaborate the reality that has become objective and transform it from structures of the external world back into structures of our subjective consciousness through internalisation. Berger (1969) writes that

Although all culture originates and is rooted in the subjective consciousness of human beings, once formed it cannot be reabsorbed into consciousness at will. It stands outside the subjectivity of the individual as, indeed, a world. In other words, the humanly produced world attains the character of objective reality (9).

Thus, we internalise the outside world through the process of socialisation. In relating to other people, individuals learn to accept their culture's sacred canopy as a given and natural reality. Each society, according to Berger, creates a *nomos*, a meaningful order that is then imposed upon the experiences and meanings of individuals and provides norms and rules for every situation and every social role. These objectivated meanings are then transmitted from one generation to the next (15). Through language, a society builds up a cognitive and normative edifice that forms the bulk of "knowledge". Knowledge consists of

interpretative schemas, moral maxims and collections of traditional wisdom that the man in the street frequently shares with the theoreticians. Societies vary in the degree of differentiation in their bodies of "knowledge". Whatever these variations, every society provides for its members an objectively available body of "knowledge". To participate in the society is to share its "knowledge", that is, to co-inhabit its *nomos* (21).

Traditionally this process of constructing a world-view and *nomos* has been a religious enterprise, although it has become more self conscious and dispersed since the arrival of the modern era. Religion and “quasi-religions”, such as Marxism, or faith in science and progress, functioned in modernity as “grand narratives” or, in Jean François Lyotard’s (1984) words, “narratives of legitimation”, which “determine criteria of competence and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do” (1984: 23). Each grand narrative sought legitimation by its own discourse to claim a superior status over all other belief systems. Each of them claimed to describe the causes of social problems and inequality; each of them held out the promise of a better future, whether it was religion's promise of salvation, Marxism's class utopia or science's promise of material ease and plenty. Over the last decades, postmodernist theorists - first and foremost Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979/1984) - have described what they call “the collapse of the grand narratives”. Science, technology and efficient management have lost much of their allure in the course of a century which has witnessed two world wars of appalling devastation, the development of atomic and germ warfare, widening inequalities between rich and poor, and environmental destruction on a scale which threatens all life on earth. To many people, religions seem unable to account for such unprecedented evils: the sacred canopy appears to have lost its capacity to effectively respond to people’s needs. Zygmunt Bauman (1997) argues that postmodernity necessarily involves this awareness of the failure of modernity, and is a “condition of overwhelming and self-perpetuating uncertainty” (25). Although the struggle to control the production of culture has been widespread throughout human history, the postmodern world sees religious leaders competing in a cultural marketplace trying to offer security and order, often making exclusive claims to the

truth. The circulation and consumption of religions can be analysed through the metaphor of the “religious marketplace”.

1.2. Syncretism and the Religious Marketplace

The metaphor of religious marketplace is useful to contrast the general idea of the decline of religion, which sees the world becoming more and more secularised. Thinkers such as Talcott Parsons (1951) and Brian Turner (1983) have suggested that as societies become more complex, it is harder for religious institutions to maintain their hold and to act as “social cement”. But as Bruce (1996: 8) points out, the secularisation theory mainly refers to a supposed “golden age” when religions (i.e. the Christian Churches) were thoroughly diffused worldwide and formed a compact frame of reference. This large diffusion is to be seen as something of an anomaly, though one often taken as a universal norm by European and American sociologists of religion. If religious perspectives may be relatively uniform in small, homogeneous societies, they are never so in heterogeneous ones, and attempts to impose a single sacred canopy over such societies are never fully successful.

The syncretic trend in contemporary religion is the result of the dynamics of globalisation in the development of what Marshall McLuhan (1962) first referred to as the “global village”. Ninian Smart (1990) defines our new global civilisation as “an age of opportunity” (299). Indeed, we live in a world that is “information rich”, and powerful communications provide access to the cultures, ideas and products of the entire world. One consequence of globalisation for religions is that they become more like commodities: they compete to be consumed. Since cultural and social diversity are the distinguishing characteristic of modern life, individuals or groups in the global

village can choose their religious orientations from a variety of options rather than simply accepting the specific sacred canopy transmitted to them by their family and their societies in early childhood.

Dissatisfied with the sacred canopy metaphor, recent scholars (Glock and Stark, 1965; Stark and Bainbridge, 1985; Iannaccone, 1991) coined the image of the “religious marketplace” to emphasise the fact that in a multicultural society religious institutions and traditions compete for adherents, and worshippers shop for a religion in much the same way that consumers choose among options in the marketplace for goods and services. Stark and Bainbridge (1985, 1987) have argued that the human condition is such that people will always need religion. The initial premise is that humans desire “rewards” but, as these are in short supply, they will be in the market for “compensators”, which explain why the desired rewards have not been forthcoming, promise that they will arrive in the future, and explain how they might be achieved. Because they can invoke the supernatural, religious compensators are more persuasive and powerful than secular ones. Thus, religion provides a “compensation” for problems and difficulties people face in their daily lives, and so long as the demand for rewards outstrips their supply, people will be essentially and enduringly religious.

The main proposition of the market theory is that religious choice is a rational activity because of the “compensator” concept, and that there is a constant potential human demand for religious goods over time and between societies. The supply of these religious goods varies, and it is this variation which explains the levels of religious vitality in different societies: the more varied the supply of religious goods, i.e. the greater the religious diversity, the better for religious vitality (Iannaccone: 1992). Also, the rational choice theory directly confronts issues of identity: in pluralistic societies, in fact, subgroups gain from their distinctiveness in the religious marketplace, so that such issues as sacrifice and stigma – which are usually seen as costs when an individual is

making choices – actually become benefits to a religious group that deliberately seeks tension with the dominant culture in order to provide participants with a distinctive identity. Religious worldviews usually acknowledge that believers might incur costs or be labelled negatively for their beliefs but claim that future rewards will compensate them for any current suffering. Thus, being members of a religious community labelled deviant by the mainstream becomes, for many believers, a way of protesting the trends of modernism and postmodernism, or of stating particular political positions.

Initially, the market theory of religion and society was developed to describe the specific context of the United States, but was recently successfully applied to account for European contexts as well. In particular, the Italian case has been analysed by Roberto Marchisio and Maurizio Pisati in 1999 and by Luca Diotallevi in 2002. Their theories regarding the Italian religious market will be illustrated in Chapter 4.

1.3. The Rise of New Religious Movements

The spreading of new religions during the second half of the twentieth century has been seen primarily as a result of the increasingly global character of the contemporary world which allows the wider circulation of religious beliefs (Clarke, 2006: vi). The rise of new religious movements (henceforth NRMs) can be considered as either a manifestation of secularisation or as a response to secularisation, as debated in Berger (1969) and Wilson (1969; 1982), who understand the increasingly secular nature of society as grounded in the progressive rationalisation of the social system. The process of rationalisation slowly affects religious institutions, diminishing their manifest power in social affairs, and subverting their latent social functions. Wilson characterises the overall change as a shift from “community” to “societal system” (1982: 32-46), and

maintains that this shift in the basic configuration of social life undergirds the more specific changes in values and social structures associated with the rise of NRMs. For Wilson, in fact, the reason of the success of new religions is that they “offer reassurance to men [*sic*] in more immediate ways. They cut through the encumbrances of tradition: they use contemporary language and symbols, and a more direct path of spiritual mobility” (130).

Berger (1969: 132-138) addresses the same basic shift somewhat differently, and argues that with the emergence of the modern world, the religious monopolies of the past are gone and unlikely to ever return under the conditions of advanced capitalism. As a consequence, religions must adapt to two new environmental realities: privatisation and pluralism. In Berger's view, “the religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be marketed”. It must be 'sold' to a clientele that is no longer constrained to 'buy'" (137). Religious institutions have become marketing agencies and the religious traditions have become consumer commodities. According to Berger, secularisation engenders a marketability of religions, a condition in which religious organisations have either the choice to “refuse to accommodate themselves, entrench themselves behind whatever socio-religious structures they can maintain or construct, and continue to profess the old objectives as much as possible as if nothing had happened” (152) or they can accommodate to the situation and “play the pluralistic game of religious free-enterprise” (Ibid.). A consequence of the competition in the new religious marketplace is that religions must rationalise their efforts, resulting in their increased homogenisation. Religious organisations become increasingly bureaucratic and hence similar in form and function, and their products succumb to the processes of standardisation and marginal differentiation. In the effort to meet the consumers' needs, each organisation tries to fashion a product which could guarantee a competitive edge, maintained through the

development and preservation of marginal differences in style and approach, while minimising any real differences in substance.

Stark and Bainbridge (1985; 1987) agree that secularisation is happening, but they maintain that secularisation is a constantly occurring element of all religious economies, and not a unique attribute of the contemporary world (1987, ch. 9). Properly understood, secularisation refers to the periodic collapse of specific and dominant religious organisations as a consequence of their becoming more worldly, more accommodating to the non religious aspects of their cultural contexts. Contrary to Berger and Wilson, thus, Stark and Bainbridge insist that in this more limited sense secularisation should not be confused with the loss of the need for general “supernatural compensators”. The reverse is true. It is the failure to provide sufficiently vivid and consistently “supernatural compensators” that accounts for the decline of established religions. When religions ossify in this way, they engender the proliferation of movements oriented toward religious revival, or religious innovation.

According to Wilson (1988), however, the rise of new movements cannot significantly reverse the secularisation process, since these movements are to be considered as the product of the modern societal system, rather than its opponent:

In their style and in their specific appeal [NRMs] represent an accommodation to new conditions, and they incorporate many of the assumptions and facilities encouraged in the increasingly rationalised secular sphere. Thus it is that many new movements are in themselves testimonies to secularisation: they often utilise highly secular methods of evangelism, financing, publicity and mobilisation of adherents. Very commonly, the traditional symbolism, liturgy and aesthetic concern of traditional religion are abandoned for much more pragmatic attitudes and for systems of control, accountancy propaganda and even doctrinal content which are closer to the styles of secular enterprise than to traditional religious concerns (1965).

Thus, in the debate over secularisation, NRMs can be seen either as remnants of traditional religions, transformed and adapted to a reduced existence in a secular context, or as fully fledged new religions, with the potential in some cases to be the precursors of a true revival of religion. Focussing on the means employed by NRMs, Wilson (1988) sees evidence of the triumph of secularity in their attempt to harness the techniques of instrumental rationality to advance their nonrational ends. He is pessimistic about their chances for success, because he believes that the incongruity of rational means and nonrational ends will generate irresolvable tension in the NRMs. Like Berger (1969), Wilson believes that rational means of propagation will lead to the dilution of religious specificities, and the movements will eventually become routinised, bureaucratic entities indistinguishable from the culture they oppose.

Religious movements, however, do not necessarily have to be seen as in total opposition to their host society. Deviation and conformity are often inextricably linked. As Lorne Dawson (1998) underlines, “while innovative religious movement often appear to arise as responses to tensions within their secular host societies, they also tend to incorporate central cultural elements from those societies” (584). Thus, a marked element of cultural continuity between the deviant religions and the dominant culture can be traced, and the presence of such continuity weighs in favour of the chances for success of various NRMs. As will be highlighted in Chapter 3, Soka Gakkai is precisely one of the religious movements which more profitably balances its religious specificities in accordance with the cultural repertoire of the host country.

1.3.1. Defining and Redefining New Religious Movements

Although NRMs present profound differences in terms of practices, rituals, beliefs and provenance, Wilson (1981) attempted to identify some common characteristics among them, such as “exotic provenance; new cultural life-style; a level of engagement markedly different from that of traditional Church Christianity; charismatic leadership; a following predominantly young and drawn in disproportionate measure from the better-educated and middle class sections of society; and social conspicuity” (v).

The stress on the exotic provenance and on the appeal on a young membership endorses the thesis of American sociologists (Bellah, 1976; Wuthnow, 1976) which sees the NRMs as a product of the counterculture rebellion of the 1960. However, as Clarke suggests (2000; 2006), it might not be correct to depict the diffusion of NRMs as a phenomenon flowing directly from West to East, starting in the USA. Some Japanese movements, and primarily the Soka Gakkai, have spread their influence in parts of Africa, in Brazil and other South American countries, and in Europe.

The element of charisma seems to be common to a number of new religions. The sociological definition of charisma derives from Max Weber’s seminal work *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisations* (1947). “The term charisma”, Weber writes,

will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These as such are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (358-359).

New movements are often the creation of a charismatic leader, and tend to be dominated by his or her personality, placing great emphasis on the virtue of surrender (Clarke, 1991: 176). New converts tend to join a new religious movement for social reasons, adopting first the ethos of a group, and gradually accepting its worldview as well. The primary function of the charismatic leader is thus to guide his converts towards acceptance of a precise orientation toward the world. Roy Wallis (1984) has argued that a functional way to categorise NRMs is precisely according to their worldview:

A new movement may embrace the world, affirming its normatively approved goals and values; it may reject that world, denigrating those things held dear within it; or it may remain as far as possible indifferent to the world in terms of its religious practice, accommodating to it otherwise, and exhibiting only mild acquiescence to, or disapprobation of, the ways of the world (4).

NRMs can thus be divided into three broad groupings: world-affirming, world rejecting, and world-accommodating movements. Each category displays different attitudes toward the outside world and this is evident by way of their principal beliefs and the kind of people that any given movement attracts. Falling within the world-rejecting category would be such NRMs as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the Unification Church (commonly known as the Moonies) or Family of Love (previously the Children of God). These movements carry a strong system of morally ascribed rules, and often a puritanical set of beliefs. Their teachings will be critical of, and in conflict with, wider society, viewing the prevailing social order as having departed from God's prescription. The world-rejecting groups, require "a life of service to the guru or prophet" (11) and are characterised by a strong charismatic leadership and clear organisational hierarchy. This relationship often entails the absolute surrender of the disciple, for whom all other relationships, and especially those with family or friends, must become of secondary importance. The resulting constraints of

the communal life and an authoritarian leadership typical of this kind of movements provide a basis for the rhetoric of the “anti-cult” movement, and the accusations of brainwashing and manipulation.³

Secondly, there are world-accommodating movements, which neither completely embrace nor reject the world. To them, “religion is not construed as a primarily social matter; rather, it provides solace or stimulation to personal, interior life” (35). One example of this group is the Charismatic Renewal Movement (Neo Pentecostalism), a revivalist movement within Christianity, characterised by enthusiastic participation in worship, and by personal experiences of the Holy Spirit. Unlike world-rejecting varieties, the world-accommodating movements do not express a protest against the world or society. Rather, they protest against prevailing religious institutions and their loss of vitality. Thus, these movements aim at restoring the spiritual life of their followers, offering fresh rituals and enthusiasm.

A third type of movement is what Wallis refers to as world-affirming movements. In many cases these hardly appear to be religions at all: they may have no collective ritual of worship, and may lack prescriptive principles of behaviour. According to Stephen Hunt (2003) these features brings them close to Stark and Bainbridges's definition of “client” and “audience” cults (90).⁴ Typically, adherents to these movements are customers who are literally buying a service, such as healing, or realising personal abilities. This is the case of Transcendental Meditation (TM), which offers personal mantras for individual practice. World-affirming movements claim to possess readily available means to enable people to unlock their physical, mental or spiritual potential without the need to withdraw from the world. They do not view the

³ On the issue of brainwashing and Anti-Cult movements see among others Beckford, 1985; Hassan, 1988; Introvigne, 1995.

⁴ See also Rodney Stark and W. Bainbridge (1985) *The Future of Religion*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

social order as irredeemably unjust. Rather, they maintain that the source of suffering lies within oneself and that human beings have to work toward the creation of a society composed of happy, creative individuals.

The three categories are not, however, mutually exclusive. A movement can “reposition” itself in its adaptive process to different cultures. This is precisely the case of Soka Gakkai. Wallis (1984), in fact, sees the Japanese Soka Gakkai and the “Western supporters of Soka Gakkai” as two distinctive and separate phenomena.⁵ According to his analysis, the Japanese movement started with world-affirming characteristics, focussing its members on the attainment of “material well-being, family harmony, friends, good health, inner security, and a sense of meaning, purpose and direction” (24). In its transition to Western culture, however, the movement underwent a process of substantial changes in style that made its character shift toward a world-accommodating typology. As Wallis points out, Soka Gakkai’s movement began travelling abroad in the 1960s. The early membership of the movement in the USA was among Japanese-Americans, many of whom were GI brides. During the 1960s, the movement attracted a large number of Caucasian Americans. In the course of this revolution in its social composition, the movement sought self-consciously to accommodate to American society and “to ingratiate itself with Americans” (38). Strategies of accommodation included the use of the American flag, prominently displayed in the movement’s buildings, or the translation into English of basic Japanese concepts, in order to convey the impression that Soka Gakkai’s aims and values were in conformity with those values and traditions predominant in the host society.

⁵ In his *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* (1984) Wallis limits his analysis of the “Western” Soka Gakkai to Britain and the USA. Also, being written in 1984, the book does not account for the separation between the Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai, which took place between 1990 and 1991.

1.3.2. Refining the Terminology

During the 1960s, social scientists began using the term New Religious Movements (NRMs) to cover a disparate collection of religious expressions, and to refer to “organised attempts to mobilise human and material resource for the purpose of spreading new ideas and sensibilities of a religious nature” (Beckford, 1986: 29). The use of both the term “new” and the term “religious” is highly imprecise, as Eileen Barker (1985) points out:

most of the movements referred to as part of the current wave of new religious movements are *new* in that they have become visible in their present form since the Second World War: and most are *religious* in the sense that either they offer a religious or philosophical world-view, or they claim to provide the means by which some higher goal such as transcendental knowledge, spiritual enlightenment, self-realisation or ‘true’ development may be obtained. The term is, thus, used to cover groups that might provide their members with ultimate answers to fundamental questions, such as the meaning of life or one’s place in the nature of things (145).

The term NRM, then, functions as an umbrella-phrase to cover movements deriving from a wide range of religious traditions. The Family of Love (previously known as Children of God), for example, and other strands of the Jesus movement, which originated in the Californian counter-culture in the late 1960s, obviously have a Christian origin. Zen groups and Nichiren's movements such as Soka Gakkai have their roots in Buddhism, whereas the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) or the disciples of the Divine Light Mission stem from Hinduism. Some NRMs are more syncretic and merge together different religious traditions, such as the Unification Church (Moonies), which mixes Christian ideas with elements of Taoism

and Confucianism. Other NRMs show little connection with previous religions, and are part of the vast human potential movement which includes Scientology and Neo-Pagan groups (Hunt, 2003: 109).

It must be noted that the term NRM is applied differently in different cultural contexts. Whereas in Europe and North America it is widely used to group innovative religious and spiritual movements that have emerged since the end of World War Two, in Japan scholars date the rise of “new religions” back to the early nineteenth century, and further label as “new-new religions” all those movements which flourished starting from the 1970s. Besides, it can be argued that some of the religions included in the definition of NRM are not “new” in a cultural or theological sense, and that many movements would not accept to be defined as “new”. This is the case of the Soka Gakkai, which claims to stem from the oldest and purest Buddhist tradition (Murata, 1969: 70) or of the ISKCON, which claims to be rooted in Vedic beliefs (Barker, 1995: 147).

Sociologists have pointed out the difficulties in adjusting pre-existent terminologies to new aspects of religiosity. Thus, in the Western world, the term NRM has generally been adopted to replace previous definitions like “cult” or “sect” to avoid the negative connotation that those terms have acquired in everyday parlance (Barker, 1989: 5). By virtue of the special historical relationship that exists in the West between the State and the Christian Churches, in fact, terms like “sects”, “cults”, and “deviations” convey a mixture of doctrinal, cultural, historical or social judgements, measured against the yardstick of a supposed “normality”.⁶ In Italy, for instance, where there is a tendency to take for granted the Catholic hegemony, the use of the term *setta* would lead to a conceptual opposition between “sect” and “religion” *tout court*.

⁶ For examples of the use of the term New Religious Movements in the sociological literature, see Barker (ed.) (1982); Beckford (1985); Richardson (ed.) (1988); Robbins (1988); Shupe and Bromley (1980); Wallis (1983); Wilson (1982).

Besides, as James Beckford (1982) points out, the idea of “cults” is associated in popular sentiment to the idea of brainwashing, self-harm, external control, fanaticism, and instability (62).

The problem of definitions is by no means confined to Western sociology. In Japan, the term *shinshukyo* had to be adopted to replace the derogatory *shinkoshukyo*, which set a negative opposition between “new” and “old” traditions (see also Chapter 2). More doubts arise when referring to NMRs membership. Barker (1989) asks whether members of a new religion should be labelled as “converted” or “recruited” (4), and Beckford (1985) discusses the implications of the use of terms such as “devotee”, “disciple” or “adept” (27). In the same way, it is difficult to decide what to call a person who leaves a NRM. Terms such as “apostate” or “defector”, have been used in the literature on the subject (Barker, 1989: 5). In the specific case of the Italian Soka Gakkai, members heavily draw from their pre-existent Christian vocabulary, and refer to themselves as *convertiti*, and *discepoli* of Daisaku Ikeda, a man whom they are encouraged to refer to as *il mio Maestro* (my Master). Significantly, Soka Gakkai members refer to those who quit the organisation as *traditori*. A look at Soka Gakkai publications in Italy shows that, during the period in which Soka Gakkai was part of the Japanese Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist School, the Nichiren Shoshu was identified as “a religious organisation” devoted to the propagation of *Vero Buddismo* (True Buddhism). After the dramatic split of 1991 (see Chapter 3), the publications refer to the same organisation as *la setta*.

New religions in the West and Japan derive from many different cultures and can vary enormously in terms of content, rituals, attitude towards one another and the wider society. They have also posed a great many questions for that wider society obliging it, for instance, to re-examine, and in certain instances to refine and develop its legal concepts and definition of religion. Numerous vested interests, both religious and

secular, surround the statutory definitions of NRMs, and some groups assert their definition in order to make a particular point because of the benefits or restrictions implied by their own or other's understanding of the term "religion". Differences in the cultural and legal environments may influence the status a NRM claims. In Italy, for example, being defined as a "religion" may mean that a NRM can claim tax exemption. Also, according to Italian laws, a religion can be taught in schools (see Chapter 4).

Eileen Barker (1989/1995: 146) provides many other examples, and lists the case of Transcendental Meditation (TM) which launched an attempt in the USA to prove that it is *not* a religion, but, rather, a "technique for deep relaxation and revitalisation", a technique suitable to be taught in the states' schools. The attempt was made to by-pass the United States' law which does not allow religion to be taught in public schools. The Church of Scientology, in converse, has fought in Australian courts to be registered as a religion for the purposes of taxation (146).

1.4. THE TRANSLATABILITY OF RELIGION

In 1964 Eugene Nida suggested that "translation problems are essentially problems of equivalence" (1964: 91). Indeed, languages are fundamentally symbols for features of the culture, and "words cannot be understood correctly apart from the local cultural phenomena for which they are symbols" (97). This section explores the symbolic value of the word "religion" as it is perceived in Western culture, to highlight the extent in which its specific etymological features, together with its substantive and functional elements render it resistant to the accommodation of "foreign" rituals and practices within its meaning.

1.4.1. The Notion of “Religion”

Much of the debate in the field of sociological and anthropological studies has centred on the core question as to what should be included in a definition of “religion” from a wide range of social phenomena.⁷ In its approach to the subject, the sociology of religion has tended to polarise around two theoretical positions, opening an ongoing debate as to what exactly constitutes the substantive elements of religion (what religion *is*) and its functional elements (what religion *does*). In other terms, the notion of religion is understood in the balance between its substantive elements (beliefs and practices which identify some things as sacred) and its functional elements (how religion links people together in communities and provide stability) (Yinger, 1957: 6-7).

At its simplest, religion is the belief in the supernatural. Edward Taylor offered in 1903 what is now generally accepted as the minimum substantive definition of religion: religion is “a belief in Spiritual Beings” (1969: 39). Substantive definitions are inclined to correspond to specific Western categories. Since they are based on Western ideas, these definitions usually refer to Judeo-Christian dogma. Thus, substantive definitions tend to be embraced by those who identify a demise of religion in Western society. If religion is seen as referring to the “existence of supernatural beings that have a governing effect on life” (Robertson, 1970: 47), then Max Weber (1904/1974) is certainly correct in stressing that science and rationality are eclipsing the sense of mystery that had infused the religious consciousness of pre-modern man (47-78). Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Weber postulated that conditions such as urbanisation, technological advances and the growth of the capitalist economy would lead to a progressive rationalisation of meanings and motivations, and to the formation

⁷ A collection of essays tracing the development of the sociology of religion can be found in: Norman Birnbaum and Gertrud Lenzer (eds.) (1969) *Sociology and Religion: A Book of Readings*.

of a this-worldly society. To Weber, the work ethic which had originated from what he defines as “Puritan worldly asceticism” (180) would in time turn back and erode its Christian foundations. In this view, limiting the discussion to the decline of Christianity, it is correct to conclude that a religious decline and a progressive secularization are taking place.

Functional definitions and the idea of culture as a social product originate from the work of Emile Durkheim. In his study on *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915/1968), Durkheim viewed religion as the most fundamental bond among people of earlier times. Human beings, he pointed out, cannot conceive of time and space independently of socially agreed-upon division, even though we know they are arbitrary and not natural. All categories of thought, all essential ideas are “collective representations which express collective realities” (10). Human beings are “double”, in that they possess an individual biological component and a shared social component, a participation in a collective consciousness (Griswold, 1994: 49). As Durkheim (1968) notes, all religious beliefs divide the world into sacred and profane, and the sacred/profane distinction organises and classifies all social and natural beings (37). To Durkheim, religion is:

a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church – all those who adhere to them (1968: 47).

From a sociological point of view, then, both the definition of religion and the choice of the terminology to speak about it are problematic. In Western societies, definitions of “religion” have often included references to a single God, and the debate about religious organisations makes use of terms such as “churches”, “cults”, and “sects”, words that in everyday use are normally applied specifically to Christianity. Besides, if one accepts

the substantive definition of religion, which postulates a belief in the supernatural, the idea of religion can be broadened to include the UFO cult, but will leave out faiths such as Buddhism which – formally – makes no reference to a God. At the same time functional definitions, primarily concerned with the role of religion in providing stability and integration of society, could embrace practically all social phenomena, including socio-political ideologies like Marxism and Communism (Bruce, 1996: 6).⁸

Religion and sociology were always closely linked historically. The discipline of sociology was established largely by people who lived and worked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: thinkers such as Durkheim, Freud, Marx, Simmel and Weber, who sought to use scientific methods to explain social life in an effort to come to terms with both the storms of modernism and the crisis of faith that originated from a new level of self-consciousness about fundamental questions ordinarily taken for granted or explained by religious tradition. These early thinkers, Lester Kurtz (1995) points out:

were usually male, white, and were living in a culture built on a Judeo-Christian tradition. In many ways, they set the sociological agenda, an agenda that proved to be relevant for over a hundred years and starts to be challenged today, by the emergence of new paradigms of investigation that must take into account the influence of notions such as globalisation and post-modernity (6).

“The postmodern mind”, writes Zygmunt Bauman (1997), “is soberly aware of the tendency of definitions to conceal as much as they reveal and to maim and obfuscate while pretending to clarify and straighten up” (165). A definition of such a sensitive concept as “religion” is not at all easy to reach, since it “belongs to a family of curious

⁸ To explore the applicability of functional definitions of religion, the word “quasi-religions” has recently been coined. See Arthur L. Greil, and Thomas Robbins (1994). *Between Sacred and Secular: Research and Theory on Quasi-religions*.

and often embarrassing concepts which one perfectly understands until one wants to define them" (Ibid.). At least since Georg Simmel's famous statement that "no one has been able to offer a definition of religion that is both precise and sufficiently comprehensive" (1898/1997: 101), sociological and anthropological studies have attempted a scientific approach to religion in order to evaluate and assess its social and psychological implication under the most "clear and neutral light" (Geertz, 1966/1996: 40).⁹

In the framework of postmodernity, characterised by "an emphasis on the acquisition of personal religious experience" (Dawson, 2001: 356), a scientific and "neutral" approach is often challenged by the lack of a "common and shared language to talk about transcendental meanings" (Besecke, 2001: 365). A major assumption of this dissertation is that all knowledge is shaped by the social context of the knower. As Giambattista Vico (1668 - 1774) reminded us as early as the eighteenth century, we cannot know the world in and of itself, but only as it is filtered through the categories of the mind (1774/1968: 60, §122).¹⁰ Modern thinking has developed a corollary for this affirmation (Foucault, 1971; 1988; Lyotard, 1984) to underline how our perceptions of phenomena determines the way we talk about them.

At the same time, how we think and talk about the world shapes how we behave, and the kind of world we help to create as a result. In this light, the phenomenon of

⁹ In 1966 Clifford Geertz wrote that "One of the main methodological problems in writing about religion scientifically is to put aside at once the tone of the village atheist and that of the village preacher, as well as their more sophisticated equivalents, so that the social and psychological implications of particular religious beliefs can emerge in a clear and neutral light. And when that is done, overall questions about whether a religion is "good" or "bad", "functional" or "dysfunctional", "ego strengthening" or "anxiety producing" disappear like the chimeras they are, and one is left with particular evaluations, assessments, and diagnoses in particular cases" (40).

¹⁰ Giambattista Vico (1774) *La Nuova Scienza*. All quotations in this dissertation are taken from: Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (trans.) (1968) *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*. Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press.

“religion” and “religiosity” can only be studied as a social mechanism, not in search for a scientific definition, but in the attempt of pointing out:

on what kind of assumptions, what kind of familiar, unchallenged unconsidered modes of thought the [religious] practices that we accept rest (Foucault, 1988: 154).

Since sociology was born in Europe, many sociologists tended from the beginning to confine their investigations to European (and later, North American) societies. The sociological findings of these investigations were then applied generally to all sorts of other societies. Thus, conclusions arrived at by studying the social organisation and social consequences of Judeo-Christian religions in Europe were universalized and extended so as to apply to all religions. As Roland Robertson (1992) points out, although the term “religion” in its etymological history has played a significant part in the fate of a number of civilisations, it still fails to have thoroughly contested public and global significance (3). The sociology of religion still has to cope with the consequences of this historical bias towards Christianity, Europe and North America. Often (and perhaps inevitably) sociologists have equated Christianity with the “familiar” and equated other religions with the unfamiliar and the exotic. The historical bias towards European societies is apparent in the use of such terms as “Western” and “non-Western”, the meaning of which has become increasingly uncertain. If until the beginning of the last century, the term “West” could count on a geographical specificity, mainly referring to European countries that had colonies around the world, nowadays “Western” is more a label for all industrialised nations, no matter their location on the globe, whose capitalist and growth-oriented economies and political systems are interconnected (Robertson, 1992: 85-96).

In past centuries, Western missionaries and colonists exported Christianity across the world as new trade routes opened up and foreign territories were annexed to Western nations. Today, the process is by no means all a one-way traffic. The West is now influenced by the global ebbs and flows of various expressions of religiosity emanating from other cultures. Arjun Appadurai (1990) talks of the global flow of *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes*, a concatenation of ideas and images which travel to construct narratives of the “other” (299). Images of Oriental religions have travelled West, and have led to the formation of an *ideoscape* of new religious beliefs. Today, ideas concerning themes such as reincarnation, the unity of man and nature, the oneness of body and the spirit, have entered the mainstream of cultural debate. Colin Campbell (1999) maintains that the traditional Western cultural paradigm no longer dominates in the West and it is increasingly being replaced by an Eastern one (41). Eastern worldviews, principally expressed in Hindu and Buddhist thought, are challenging Western religious assumptions. These Oriental traditions may reach the West in their pure form, such as the various strands of Buddhism, or may be the result of syncretism and innovation. Religious adaptation has occurred through a process which, following Roland Robertson (1992), has come to be known as *glocalisation*, i.e. the accommodation of global influences to localised conditions.¹¹

¹¹ The term “glocalisation” derives from the Japanese concept *dochakuka*, which means “global localisation”. The term was initially developed in particular reference to marketing issues. See Roland Robertson (1992: 173-74). *Globalisation. Social Theory and Global Culture*.

1.4.2. The Linguistic Advantage of Catholicism in Italy

As will be seen in Chapter 4, the perception of Italy as a monolithic Catholic country is reinforced by a recent Doxa survey (1994), which underlines that only 1.6 percent of Italians declare they have opted for one of the numerous religious organisations competing with the Catholic Church. Commenting on the survey, Maurizio Pisati (1998) concludes that religious pluralism in Italy is still a “un fenomeno debole e imperfetto” (71).

It must be noted, however, that these data refer to membership of religions of Judeo-Christian origin, such as the Waldensian Church, the Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses or the Jewish Community. There is still a lack of sources concerning New Religious Movements in Italy, the only official data available being a police inquiry conducted in 1998 by the Ministry of the Interior. Here, the linguistic bias against the NRMs is evident in its title, *Rapporto sulle sette religiose e i nuovi movimenti magici in Italia*.¹² The title refers to “sects” and declares that about 80,000 Italians belong to *pseudo-religioni*.

As already discussed, religion is not an entity, but rather “a category of discourse whose precise meaning and implications are continually being negotiated in the course of social interaction” (Greil and Robbins, 1994: 6). In recent times, the sociology of religion has come to confront the challenge of elaborating a new terminology to define the bulk of new belief flourished in the West during the second half of the twentieth century.

¹² “Sette religiose e nuovi movimenti magici in Italia”. Ministero dell’Interno. Dipartimento di Pubblica Sicurezza. Direzione Centrale Polizia di Prevenzione. Febbraio 1998. Reported and commented at: <http://xenu.com-it.net/rapporto/>

Definitions such as pseudo-religions, quasi-religions or folk-religions have been coined to refer to groups and activities which deal with the sacred but are anomalous in the light of the accepted definition of religion in a given society (Greil and Robbins, 1994: 7). In her article “But is it a Genuine Religion?”, Eileen Barker (1994) underlines that all definitions of religion are of limited usefulness in understanding how ordinary people draw the borders between what is to be accepted as a proper religion and what is not. Barker writes:

It is possible to observe that people may (at least on occasions when values or interests are concerned) want implicitly to confine the use of the term ‘religion’ to ‘religion-that-I-approve-of’ (101).

Today there is a general agreement (see for example Wallerstein, 1990: 31-55; Robertson, 1992: 1-17) that religion has become a globally diffused mode of discourse. Robertson (1992) in particular points out how globalisation requires the formation of a new consciousness of “the relativity and historicity of the category of religion” and underlines the need to “enquire systematically into the genealogies of those categories in non-Western societies which appear to parallel Western categories” (16). In an analysis of the translation and adaptation of a Buddhist religion into a Western Catholic country, it is thus vital to understand that the very concept of “religion” pertains to categories that, in the passage from East to West, are of particular resistance to the concept of “equivalence”.

If analysed from a linguistic point of view, in fact, the issue of religious pluralism in Italy prompts a central question: are non-Christian religions truly failing in competing with the Catholic monopoly, or, rather, are they failing to be recognised and evaluated as “religions”? In other words, it is possible to suggest that current surveys on Italian religiosity, whose questionnaires are structured around questions about *religione*,

are unable to detect the existence of a vast segment of beliefs and practices that in common Italian parlance are felt to be related more to the sphere of “spirituality” than to that of “religion”.

The problem of linguistic definition is dominant in Massimo Introvigne’s seminal work *Le nuove religioni* (1989), in which the author accounts for a broad range of non-Judeo-Christian beliefs that have spread in Italy during recent times. For many of these beliefs, Introvigne states, the definition of “religion” is perceived as inappropriate, as the “idea of God is absent, or plays a very secondary role” (358). These movements are thus often categorised under the label of “spirituality” or “philosophy”.

In Italy, no research has been conducted so far on the exact amount of the population which seek to satisfy their demand of religious goods through syncretism, or through adhering to one of the specific groups perceived by Italian society as “spiritual”. Besides, Italian sociological literature draws a neat distinction between “religion” and “spirituality” (Acquaviva and Pace, 1998: 8). Commenting on the problematic definition of such words, Stefano Allevi (2003) denounces a lack of methodological framework, and urges Italian sociology of religion to adopt a new interpretative paradigm (2003: 281-83).

It is my opinion that a new interpretative paradigm for the study of Italian religiosity should include a reflection on linguistic issues, as outlined in the approach of Translation Studies, a discipline which, as Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere explain in their seminal work *Constructing Cultures* (1998) seeks to explore the interplay of the cultural factors that lay at the basis of every linguistic interaction.

The meaning of “translation” has come a long way since John Catford (1965) defined it primarily as “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)” (20). In the relatively recent

developments of Translation Studies as a discipline, translation has come to be viewed as an operation involving not only language, but also and above all cultures. As Susan Bassnett (1998) notes,

a translation always takes place in a continuum, never in a void, and there are all kinds of textual and extratextual constraints upon the translator. These constraints, or manipulatory processes, involved in the transfer of texts have become the primary focus of work in translation studies. (123-124).

Specifically, in the case of Soka Gakkai's religious vocabulary, the translation constraints arise from dissimilarity in the way Japanese and Italian cultures conceive of religious matters and, to a wider extent, the world. The idea that human beings perceive the world according to mental structures influenced by their own language was put forward by Edward Sapir and further developed by Benjamin Lee Whorf (1940), who explains:

we dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages....We cut nature up, organise it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organise it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language...we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organisation and classification of data which the agreement decrees (213-214).

It becomes understandable then that the way the Italian system constructs its own culture is peculiar to its vision of the world and influenced by its own language. Specifically, a major role in the construction of Italian culture has been played by the Roman Catholic religion, on whose principles Italian society has been (and in a way still is) moulded. Considering this, and taking into account the above-mentioned theory of language, it is clear that linguistic elements which appear to be easily translatable at

face value contains various shades of meaning that are specific to a given culture and that, therefore, represent actual translation problems.

In Italy, the idea of language as a fundamental tool in the construction of reality was firstly explored by Giambattista Vico. During the Italian philosophical climate of the eighteenth century, dominated by Cartesian rationalism, Vico investigated the relation between language, knowledge and truth. By writing that “It is another property of the human mind that whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand” (1968: 60, §122), Vico emphasised how human beings enter into active cognizance of reality through the ordering, shaping power of language. And he expanded upon this insight by formulating the idea that – “because the first gentile people, by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets who spoke in poetic characters” (21, §34), the underlying structure of language is universal and common to all men:

Uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth. This axiom is a great principle which establishes the common sense (*sensus communis*) of the human race as the criterion taught to the nations by divine providence to define what is certain in the natural law of the gentes. ... Thence issues the mental dictionary for assigning origins to all the diverse articulated languages (63-4, §144-145).

Every single language, however, develops by the interaction between man and history, thus reflecting the different world-views of races and cultures: “... native etymologies are histories of institutions signified by the words in the natural order of ideas” (14, § 22). Convinced that the study of etymologies could become an instrument of knowledge, Vico saw philological investigation as a means to explain “the mental vocabulary of the things of human society, with the same substance felt by all nations and with diverse modifications explained differently through language” (64, §145). In

this, as George Steiner (1998) points out, “Vico can be considered to be one of the first true ‘linguistic historicist or relativists’” (79).

By standing in critical opposition to Descartes and to the rationalistic programme of philosophy upheld at Port Royal, Vico anticipates modern linguistic philosophical debates over whether or not it is possible to discover specific principles that determine both the grammatical structure of word order and the sentence construction common to many different languages (Hampshire, 1969).¹³ To Vico, the role of language is twofold. It is the tool to understand reality but also to create it at the same time. At first, perception of things is common to every man, through *universali fantastici* (“imaginative universals”, 154, §460), but then with the formation of different tongues, these universals acquire different configurations and form the bulk of *sensus communis* considered as “beliefs held in common by the members of a community” (67, §161).¹⁴ *Sensus communis* is grounded in language, and provides the means through which human beings interrelate in their social environment. It is “a judgement without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation” (§ 142).

According to Vico, then, language is historically situated in a context, and the study of etymologies (intended as the study of the origins of words, and their impact on a precise culture) is an important means to trace back the “mental dictionary” at the basis of the *sensus communis* of a nation. Thus, to explore the possibility of translation and communication between cultures whose *sensus communis* is grounded in different

¹³ Electronic source. Stuart Hampshire. “Vico and Language,” *The New York Review of Books*: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article_id=11409>

¹⁴ About the Latin term *sensus communis*, John Michael Krois (1981) underlines that its meaning differs from the English ‘common sense’ as “the latter also calls to mind a faculty or mode of thought that is often presumed to be capable of resolving complex problems by reducing them to simple and obvious considerations”, while the Latin term merely refers a common set of beliefs (58). In Italian, we have the terms “senso comune” to translate *sensus communis*, and “buon senso” to parallel the English “common sense”.

languages, and whose *universali fantastici* are the evolution of totally different experience, the first etymology that must be explored is that of the word *religione*.

Underlying the problematic nature of religious vocabulary, Jacques Derrida (1995) discusses the “global-latinisation” (*mondialatinisation*) of language, and provocatively writes that “the history of the word ‘religion’ should in principle forbid every non-Christian from using the name ‘religion’” (46). Examining the question from a different perspective, Adriano Fabris (1996) maintains that in religious matters European linguistic tradition is grounded in the “universalistic canon of Christian philosophy” (7). Fabris traces the history of the formation of a religious canon in Italy and Europe, a canon which sees Christianity as central and other religions as peripheral. The operation was primarily made at the linguistic level, and consisted in denying non-Christian faiths the linguistic appellation of “religion”. The process, which had started during the first centuries of the Christian era, reached its apex when geographical explorations in Asia and the Americas discovered religions that had evolved out of non-Christian matrices. As a reaction to that, the word “religion”, which had centred on a precise definition of God, was made to act as a Procrustean bed which obliterated the new faiths through the definition of “idolatry” and “heresy”, thus positioning them outside the accepted canon (4-7).¹⁵

A postulate of theology, Fabris remarks, is that God manifests itself by becoming *Logos*, thus opening up a communication chord between human beings and the divine. In Greek, *logos* comprehends the double meaning of “word” and “reason” (20). The Vulgate translated *logos* as *Verbum* (*parola*, *Verbo*, in Italian), thereby obliterated the importance of reason in the approach with the divine (Tondelli, 1949: 407). As Adriano Fabris remarks (1996: 25-28), the word theology has been used at least since 1123, when Abelard composed the *Theologia Christiana* to refer to the

¹⁵ On the subject, see also B. Minozzi (1970) *Introduzione allo studio della religione*, Firenze: Vallecchi.

study of the nature of a precise and culturally situated God, i.e. the God of Christianity, who communicated with men through the Sacred Scriptures (*scriptura*) and the whole bulk of canonised traditions (*traditio*).

Theology is the area where the word of God is translated to men, and is the locus of *religio*, a word that, following Lactantius and Tertullian, is etymologically based upon *religare* (to tie, to bind). From Lactantius onwards, then, the idea of *religio* begins to assume its ontological dimension, that of a link which reveals and expresses the relationship between God and humanity. It is relevant to note that, by opting for Lactantius' etymology, the Church fathers aimed at underlying the normative aspects of *religio*, whereas in Ciceronian tradition the same word was felt as a derivative of *legere* (to harvest, gather) and had a more individualistic connotation (Rosa, 1949: 25-26).¹⁶

As Leone Tondelli (1949) points out, the word religion was born in the domain of theology, and reached philosophy and other human sciences as a synonym for Christianity (and, after the Reformation, as a synonym for Catholicism), as it involves the idea of the unerring word of God (*Verbum*). At the same time, the second meaning of *logos* – reason – was made to coincide with the semantic area of *sophia* (wisdom) (407-409). Thus, *theologia* involves a reflection on faith and religion, whereas *philosophia* involves a reflection on everything pertaining to the reason and the intellect, in a hierarchical order which sees *philosophia ancilla theologiae*.¹⁷

¹⁶ An accurate study on the various etymologies of the word *religione* is presented in M. Liborio (ed.) (1976) *Il vocabolario delle istituzioni Indoeuropee*. Torino: Einaudi.

¹⁷ On the history and problems of theology see, among others, C. Rocchetta, S. Fisichella e G. Pozzo (1985) *La teologia fra rivelazione e storia*. Bologna: EDB, and G. Bof (1995) *Teologia cattolica. Duemila anni di storia, di idee, di personaggi*. Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo.

As a consequence of this ancillary position, Italian vocabulary has inherited the hierarchical gap between “religione” and “spiritualità”, where “spiritualità” is a word which defines “le facoltà intellettuali, teoretiche e affettive dell’uomo” (Battaglia, 1968: 950), whereas “religione” defines “il rapporto tra l’uomo e la divinità” (774). In the light of these reflections, it seems possible to affirm that the same hierarchical gap conditions the reception of many new religions, which, for lack of structural equivalence with the Italian religious canon are popularly perceived as “filosofie” or “spiritualità”, and fail to be recognised and registered as “religioni”.

In Italy, the word “religione” acts as a lexicalised metaphor for Christianity. The semantic connotations of this word, considered both from its etymological origin and from its long-standing use as a synonym for Roman Catholic dogma, render it largely impermeable to any attempt to accommodate references to “alien” practices and rituals within its meaning. Besides, the word operates a synecdoctic effect which renders it as a synonym for *Chiesa*. *Chiesa* is, in this case, not just any church but the Roman Catholic Church, which proclaims that *salus extra ecclesiam non est*, there is no salvation outside the Church. (Cyprian, letter 73). Thus a standard Italian dictionary definition of the word *Chiesa* refers explicitly to the Catholic Church (Devoto-Oli, 1971: 465).

Etymological interpretations are at the origins of the “linguistic advantage” of the Catholic language and of its problematic influence on the translation of Buddhist vocabulary. The quest for “equivalences” between Catholicism and Buddhism, which characterises the penetration of Soka Gakkai in Italy, however, pertains to the more complex sphere of the translation of cultures. Mary Snell-Hornby (1995) has noted that

...the extent to which a text is translatable varies with the *degree* to which it is embedded in its own specific culture, also with the distance that separates the cultural background of source text and target audience in terms of time and space (41, emphasis in original).

As far as religious translation is concerned, both these parameters – time and space – play a major role. Religions are entities that can travel through time and space. By their nature, religions spread and change their features in the process of adapting themselves to the specific situations they encounter. At the same time, they can engender profound changes in the people touched by new forms of worship. The history of a religion is mainly a history of translation, both in the strict sense of the translation of holy texts into a foreign language, and in the sense that the travelling process produces a new body of knowledge which has to be integrated in the target cultural repertoire, i.e. “the aggregate of options utilised by a group of people, and by the individual members of the group, for the organisation of life” (Even-Zohar, 1997: 355).

This integration process seems to rely mostly on the target-culture establishment. According to Snell-Hornby (1995),

... the problems do not depend on the source text itself, but on the significance of the translated text for its readers as members of a certain culture...with the constellation of knowledge, judgement and perception they have developed from it (42).

Similarly, Gideon Toury (1995) insists that “translations are facts of target cultures” (29). This approach, in which the target-culture receptivity is given a predominant position, may somehow reflect what Eugene Nida (1964/2000) calls “dynamic equivalence”, as opposed to “formal equivalence”. Discussing translation based on dynamic equivalence, Nida (1964/2000) explains that

in such a translation one is not so concerned with matching the receptor-language message with the source-language message, but with the dynamic relationship, that the relationship between receptor and message should be

substantially the same, as that which existed between the original receptors and the message” (129).

Nida is pointing out that in this approach, the understanding of the cultural patterns influencing the source language is not vital to the message in question (*ibid.*). On the contrary, the receptor response is considered a primary parameter, according to which the translation needs to be moulded in order for its message to be understood (136).

Eugene Nida is specifically dealing with Bible translation and correctly underlines that:

... the so-called Biblical culture exhibits far more similarities with more other cultures than perhaps any other culture in the history of civilisation. This is not strange, if one takes into consideration the strategic location of this culture in the Middle East, at the “crossroad of the world” and at a point from which radiated so many cultural influences. This fact makes the Bible so much more “translatable” in the many diverse cultures of the world than most books coming out of our own contemporary Western culture. This essential similarity to the cultures of so many people helps to explain something of the Bible’s wide appeal (1959: 19).

According to Edwin Gentzler (2001), Nida’s approach is that of translating the text in such a way as to make it “ready for consumption”; in other words, by disambiguating it and bringing it closer to its readership, such a text becomes “user friendly” and thus easy to spread (57). However, though this strategy may be successful with Bible translation, when it comes to Soka Gakkai’s texts translated into Italian various difficulties arise. Indeed, the theory of dynamic equivalence has apparently proved incapable of working the other way round, and easing the entrance of a foreign religion into a Bible based language context. The reason for this failure can be possibly explained by referring to Itamar Even-Zohar’s approach to translated literature. Even-Zohar (1978) sees translated literature as a system on its own and assigns it a specific

position in the literary polysystem (118).¹⁸ Within this polysystem, translated literature becomes therefore “a body of texts which is structured and functions as a system” (ibid.). Being part of a wider system, translated literature necessarily develops correlations with such system, occupying a position that depends on the space it is called to fill (120). Generally speaking, if in a given literary polysystem a genre vacuum is created, the translated literature belonging to that genre will occupy a primary position and represent a model on which that genre is likely to be moulded (120-21). In the case of Soka Gakkai texts, the situation is complex.¹⁹ On the one hand it is true that the Catholic cultural system lacks such texts, on the other hand one can say that such a system is so strongly dominated by Catholicism itself, that any other religious system is not bound to occupy a primary position in it.

Lefevere (1998) writes that “translational practice is one of the strategies a culture devises for dealing with what we have learnt to call ‘the Other’. The development of a translational strategy therefore also provides good indications of the kind of society one is dealing with” (12). He also notes that:

Cultures that do not pay much attention to the Other are not just cultures that consider themselves central in the great scheme of things; they are also cultures that are relatively homogeneous [...]. Cultures that are relatively homogeneous tend to see their own way of doing things as “naturally, the only way, which just as naturally becomes “the best” way when confronted with other ways. When such cultures themselves take over elements from outside, they will, once again, naturalise them without too many qualms and too many restrictions (14).

¹⁸ The polysystem has been defined as “a heterogeneous, hierarchized conglomerate (or system) of systems which interact to bring about an ongoing, dynamic process of evolution within the polysystem as a whole” (Shuttleworth, 1998: 178).

¹⁹ As Robertson (1993: 3) points out, the term “religion” has come to signify “a category of life”. In this light, the definition of “text” in the translation and adaptation of a religion has to be broadened to include, together with the written texts, the whole set of foreign vocabulary and rituals, of alien practices and worldviews.

Thus, an analysis of the language chosen to translate the religion of the “Other” is an analysis of a culture itself. In addition to being a set of signs that can be more or less successfully translated into another (supposed) equivalent, language also bears the traces of the social structure that it expresses, and reflects the intellectual orientation of a society, its ideologies and its habits. Jan Assmann (1996: 26-36) maintains that religion is one of the key elements in the formation of cultural specificity and identity. As he suggests, cultures which revolve around polytheistic religions have in their history actively promoted translatability, as they are more prone to accommodate cultural differentiation. In these cultures, religions “functioned as a paradigm of how living in a common world was conceivable and communicable” (28). Within monotheistic cultures, on the other hand, religion functions as a “factor of cultural (un)translatability”. “The God of Israel”, Assmann writes, “does not say ‘I am everything’ but ‘I am who I am’, negating by this expression every referent, every *tertium comparationis*, and every translatability” (32).

As the following chapters are going to illustrate, Soka Gakkai texts have entered the Italian cultural-religious polysystem through the backdoor, like immigrants whose presence is deemed necessary but whose position cannot be a predominant one. Soka Gakkai Buddhism has filled a vacuum in the tradition, but could not be recognised as a *religione* due to the strong influence of Catholic repertoire. When its status of *religione* was finally made official, however, the translation of Soka Gakkai’s texts has followed a pattern of domestication that has been cloaked by a veneer of foreignisation. According to Lefevere (1992: 149), the concept of foreignisation can be traced back to Schleimacher’s description of a strategy in which “the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him”. The foreignisation of religious vocabulary ensures that the converts are conscious that the religion they are

approaching derives from a completely different system. In Soka Gakkai, the foreignness of texts pertaining to a philosophical “otherness” has been purposely enhanced, in the attempt to remain as close as possible to the original Japanese religious concepts, and to differentiate Buddhism from the canons of domestic Catholic practices. As Lawrence Venuti (1995) underlines, however, the construction of the foreign “depends on domestic cultural material” (29). Cultural practices, and religious practices in particular, are “embedded in and shaped by institutions and traditions, i.e. by history” (Wolf, 2002: 183). Thus, at the cultural level, the act of “moving the reader” toward the source language produced an illusory effect of transparency, since the language used for the explanation of Japanese terms and Buddhist practices relied on examples and metaphors familiar to the *sensus communis* of the target Italian culture, that is, on elements pertaining to the Catholic ethos.

JAPAN: THE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC “OTHER”

2.1. Shukyo and Shin Shukyo

As Lande and Clarke (1988) point out, the basic characteristic of New Religious Movements in Japan is that they are rooted in tradition, and their “newness” cannot be understood without reference to the past (174). The past, in Japanese religious tradition, is an overlay of Shinto and Buddhism, along with elements of Confucianism, Taoism and Shamanism, which form what Byron Earhart (1969) defines as “a living museum of religions”, where “religious traditions do not have neatly separate histories, for they are not separated in Japanese Religious life” (1). Religious syncretism remains evident today in the panorama of Japanese New Religious Movements which can accommodate Buddhist, Shinto or even Christian symbols, a phenomenon perfectly compatible with Japanese mentality, where belonging to more than one religion is commonly acceptable, as shown in the diffused practice of choosing Shinto rituals for a birth celebration, a Buddhist funeral and a Christian marriage ceremony (Reader, 1989: 11). Thus, Lande and Clarke (1988) underline that

the term new religions (a term which includes both new and “new” new religions) sounds misleading when applied to Japanese culture, because these movements are neither altogether “new” nor are they necessarily “complete” religions in the Western sense. Since every new religion is constituted of

elements from one or more of the pre-existing religious traditions, these religious movements are as much renovators as innovators, as much renewed religious traditions as new traditions (174).

In Japanese culture, the very definition of “religion” is problematic. From a linguistic point of view, it must be noted that in Japan the common word for religion is *shukyo*, which is a compound of *shu* (sect or denomination) and *kyo* (teaching or doctrine). Many Japanese, however, would not be inclined to call *shukyo* the amalgam of attitudes, ideas and rituals that accompany their everyday practices. The term, *shukyo*, which is the only available Japanese word for “religion”, entered the common usage only after the Nineteenth-century encounters with Christian missionaries, and conveys notions of non-Japaneseness (O’Brien, 1996: 24). The word reflects a vision of religion which pertains mostly to Western culture, which is primarily based on monotheism and on concern for personal, other-worldly salvation. As Ian Reader (1991) explains, the term *shukyo*:

implies a separation of that which is religious from other aspects of society and culture, [and] conjure[s] up notions of narrow commitment to a particular teaching to the implicit exclusion and denial of others – something which goes against the general complementary nature of the Japanese religious tradition (14).

The complementary nature of Japanese religious sense is evident when one examines the high contamination between Shinto and Buddhist practices. Centred on neither a founder nor a specific doctrine, Shinto is grounded in rites and rituals which revolve around the special character of the Japanese, and their relationship to the *kami* (gods or spirits) according to centuries-old myths and legends (O’Brien, 1996: 16). As a collective noun, “shinto” actually embraces a wide range of cults and animistic

folkways related to the worship of a pantheon of *kami*. Everything above the individual, both in space and hierarchic order, is called *kami*, and the word itself may mean “above”, “one superior” (18).¹ Shinto (the “way of the *kami*”) and Buddhism (*Butsudo*, the “way of the Buddha”) have always been interlocked in the life of the Japanese. When imported into Japan, Buddhism both reinforced traditional Shinto customs governing the worship of ancestral deities and was transformed by Shinto’s preoccupation with this-worldliness. In other words, Buddhism was converted in accord with the indigenous tribalism of Shinto, and was thus simplified. Shinto deities were considered manifestations of Buddhas, and vice versa (20).

One theme which runs through Japanese religious history is the closeness of human beings, gods, and nature. In this context, “gods” can be understood as either the *kami* of Shinto, or the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (Buddhist divinities) of Buddhism. In contrast with monotheistic religions, Japanese tradition emphasises neither one sovereign God nor a sharp distinction between the several gods and humans. Human beings can even rise to the status of a *kami* or a Buddha, as in the case of the emperor, considered to be a living *kami*, or in the case of various military rulers (*shogun*) which were venerated as divine entities during their lifetime. The founders or the charismatic leaders of Buddhist new religions, too, are often venerated as *ikigami*, that is one possessed by a deity (Lande and Clarke, 1988: 174). The Judaeo-Christian theological tendency is to think of a hierarchy with God first, human beings second, and nature third. In contrast with this tendency, the interweaving of human beings, the gods, and

¹ Byron Earhart (1969) explains that “ Until Buddhism and Chinese culture entered Japan (about mid-sixth century), there was no need for Japanese people to find a name to distinguish the old traditional practices from any new cult. Then, because Buddhism called itself the “way of the Buddha” (*Butsudo* in Japanese), the traditional religion set itself apart by the counterpart term Shinto, “the way of the *kami*”. The two Chinese characters forming the term Shinto originated in an earlier Chinese term (pronounced *shentao*), but in Japanese it is traditionally understood in the Japanese pronunciation of *kami no michi*, “way of the *kami*”. The intention of these words is to indicate the “way of the Japanese divinities” (14).

nature is a cornerstone of Japanese religion, and forms a triangle of harmonious relationships (Earhart, 1969: 5).

Another important theme of Japanese religious history is the function of the family system, including both living and dead members. Family unity and continuity are essential for carrying out the important rituals of ancestor worship. A dead person is referred to as a Buddha (*hotoke*) and the tradition is that after a fixed number of periodic memorials the dead person joins the company of ancestors as a kind of *kami*. The family is also important for providing cohesion for religious activities. The home is often the centre of religious devotion, featuring a *kamidana* (god-shrine) for daily prayers or/and a *butsudan*, a Buddhist altar for offerings to family ancestors and periodic memorials. The Japanese social and religious organisation emphasises a hierarchic ordering based on respect for the elders. In ancient times, the head of the family clan was also a priest, and this is, according to Earhart (1969), at the origins of the hereditary character of priesthood, once Shinto and Buddhism became more highly organised (6). A strict and hierarchic organisation, often showing military features and a language pertaining to military semantics, remains among the features which characterise many Japanese New Religious Movements today (Reader, 1991: 17).

In Japanese history, religion encompasses all aspects of everyday life. Although there is no regular weekly attendance at Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples, religion is nonetheless crucial for the rites of passage. Traditionally, babies are carried to the traditional Shinto shrine, and presented to the guardian deity. Funerals are performed in a Buddhist temple, as Shinto priests traditionally decline to perform funeral rites, due to Shinto concerns with purification and avoidance of contamination with the spirits of the dead (O'Brien, 1996: 20). The departed may then be remembered according to either Shinto or Buddhist tradition, or both.

Traditionally, wedding ceremonies are performed in Shinto shrines, and it is very usual today for young couples to choose a Christian ceremony (Reader, 1991: 21). In the case of sickness or special need, a visit to the shrine or temple grants specific blessing, in a pragmatic overlay of Shinto and Buddhist traditions. Rituals, taking care of every conceivable human and spiritual need, play an important part in Japanese religious tradition. Traditionally, many rituals were connected with agriculture and fishing, in order to relate human beings, gods, and nature in a beneficial manner. Other rituals meet personal crises, such as sickness. The paper charms distributed by shrines and temples include a number of specific boons, such as warding off fire, preventing or curing sickness, and other practical benefits. Even Buddhist scriptures (usually in Chinese translation) are recited as blessings, and phrases from Buddhist scriptures are memorised as semi-magical formulas (Earhart, 1969: 9).

In the light of this brief description of the elements forming Japanese religious ethos, it is not surprising, then, that Japanese people would not recognise themselves in a notion of “religion” which, as the term *shukyo* suggests, pertains to a set of values (separation between religious and mundane things, strict commitment to a “particular” teaching) which is alien to Japanese culture.

In Japan, no separation is perceived between gods and human beings, or between individuals and society. This is evident in the language, which, expressing Japanese society and culture, is built around concepts that describe the ways in which people relate. For example, the word for human being is *ningen*. In reality, the word means “between people”. Thus, human beings are perceived as relational, and become human beings only together with other human beings (Lande, 1993: 24).

Japanese culture is not individualistic, but social at its deepest layers and concerned primarily with the relationship between people. Its religious sense, consequently, is communal, rather than individual (Shimazono, 1995: 194).

In Japan the development of a vocabulary of religion, centred around the term *shukyo*, began as a response to the opening of the country and the influx of Western influences after 1893 (Reader, 2005: 119-24). *Shukyo* was used to refer to and to serve as an equivalent of the English word *religion*. The need for a new term originated from the formation of a Western-oriented field of religious studies, that grew around the study of Christianity and extended to Eastern cultures as a result of Western colonialism. *Shukyo*, initially a Buddhist term used mainly within the Buddhist tradition, is now the normative Japanese term used in legal and academic contexts to translate the English “religion” in general. The term first came into play as the referent for the English meaning as well, a specific meaning founded in notions of doctrine, texts and practices associated with Christianity, and was associated with concepts also of civilised culture, modernity, progress and rationalisation. Thus, *shukyo* created a Western-style category of religion, which has no cultural antecedents, as is based on concepts imposed from outside Japan and founded in Western Enlightenment thought. The new vocabulary expressed an orientation towards the search for a rationalised, intellectually grounded notion of religion that sought to remove it from associations with customs, popular practices and seemingly irrational superstitions. The development of this Western-oriented concept of religion was an important element in the formation of Japan as a modern nation, and was linked to ideologies of progress and rationalisation. From the late Meiji era (1852-1912) onwards, however; Japan reappropriated the term *shukyo*, turning away from Western imports and rearticulating their own traditions. Freed from its Christian equivalencies, the term came to embody the notion of “national morality”, founded in and centred on the Imperial institution and Shinto ritual, and based in Emperor worship and in the rejection of Christianity – criticised for being world-denying.

An example of how Japanese relate to religious matters is provided by O'Brien (1996) who reports a survey conducted in Japan in the early 1980s. The survey reveals that religious practices are a strong and fundamental part in the life of Japanese people, and shows that about 60 percent of the households in Japan had a Shinto *kamidana* (Kami shelf) honouring the ancestors of the household as deities. Another 61 per cent had Buddhist altars (*butsudan*) memorialising family ancestors, and 45 percent had both; only 24 percent had neither (20).²

Other surveys, however, conducted periodically by the Japanese Ministry of Education, consistently show that, despite the fact that 60 percent of Japanese declare that they "turn to the gods in time of distress", more than 65 percent of the same Japanese profess "no religious beliefs at all" (23). In other words, they do not recognise themselves in the term *shukyo* used in the questionnaires (23-4).

The introduction of a new terminology concerning religious matters can be seen as strictly connected to historical moments of crisis in Japanese society, and the term New Religious Movements in Japan has been chosen to cover all the religious phenomena that have flourished since the end of the Nineteenth century. Thus, the term *shinko shukyo* come to indicate the new religions which, although rooted in Japanese tradition, presented innovative aspects in terms of beliefs and rituals, and incorporated many modern elements in their organisational styles (Shimazono, 1995: 196).

The term *shinko shukyo* (religions born in recent times) held a derogatory nuance, and was in time replaced by the more neutral *shin shukyo*.³ Specialists nowadays further distinguish between *shin shukyo*, which refers to all religious

² According to tradition, daily rites are performed before the *Kamidana*, on which are placed cenotaphs recording the names of ancestors, their ages and date of death, and offerings of rice, *sake*, and fish (O'Brien 1996: 20).

³ The term *shinko shukyo* was first used by journalists, in the implicit critical tone of newcomers or upstarts. As Earhart (1969) notes, "the term in Japanese is like *nouveau riche* in French, a term of contempt for those who have just acquired their wealth but still lack culture and refinement"(101).

movements born towards the end of the Nineteenth century, and *shin shin shukyo* (“new” new religions), flourished in the 1970s (Inoue, 1991: 411) or the 1980s (Reader, 2002: 15).⁴ Many of the “new” new religions are extraordinarily eclectic, and mix precepts, practices, doctrines, gods and prophets to an incredible extent, as in the case of Aum Shinrikyo, which mixes Buddhist pacifism with the worship of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, or in the case of a group called The Happy Science which numbers within its pantheon figures such as Buddha, Zeus, Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln and a space-travelling entity called El Ranty (Woronoff, 1997: 171).

In general, Japanese religions can be seen as religious societies, rather than independent religions with exclusive claims (Earhart, 1969: 87). An exception to this is the case of Japanese new religions deriving from Nichiren Buddhism, which express an exclusive claim to absolute truth (Dumoulin, 1976: 239) and in particular of Soka Gakkai, which, after the separation from the Nichiren Shoshu school in 1991 (see also Chapter 3), declares itself to be the sole exponent of “True Buddhism” (Métraux, 1994: 92).

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an account of the complex Japanese religious panorama. It is necessary, however, to highlight some features of Japanese Buddhism in general and of the Nichiren School in particular, in order to better situate into context the Soka Gakkai and its impact on Italian culture.⁵

⁴ In general, *shin shin shukyo* have been regarded as appealing to urban-based younger, well educated Japanese, as a result of “dissatisfaction with the modern scientific rationalism that forms the basis of the Japanese education and work system” (Reader, 2002: 15) and as being characterised by an emphasis on the transformation of the individual mind and body with less emphasis on traditional common values. (Shimazono, 1995: 198).

⁵ This dissertation narrows its analysis to Soka Gakkai, a New Religious Movements of Buddhist derivation. For a panorama of Japanese NRMs in general, see for instance: McFarland, 1967; Lande and Clarke, 1988; Inoue (ed.), 1991.

2.2. The Origins: Japanese Buddhism

Buddhism was officially introduced in Japan in the first half of the sixth century CE by way of Korea, which had received it from China two centuries earlier. As to the route of transmission, Japanese Buddhism may be regarded as a branch of the Northern school, and as to its overall features, it clearly represents a variation of Mahayana. A most important condition in the historical development of Japanese Buddhism from the very beginning was its philosophical and aesthetic superiority over the autochthonous religious forms (Dumoulin, 1976: 218). For this reason Buddhism was encouraged by the imperial court, as it brought to the relatively uncultured Japanese islands Chinese literacy, arts and science. Since its initial phase, then, Buddhism was adopted primarily by the political elite, and only gradually permeated the wider population. When it was introduced, Japan was in the process of consolidation, uniting various local groups, and Buddhism, together with elements of Confucianism, Taoism, and the Chinese system of writing, was accepted as an ideology to support the whole endeavour.⁶ As a consequence, Buddhism in Japan, especially during the ancient period up to about the beginning of the ninth century, came to have a close relationship with the state, a trait which has often been described as its particular quality (Tamaru, 2000: 18). Over the following nearly fifteen centuries there were a number of important movements, which broke new ground in Buddhist doctrine or practice and had a lasting influence on its future course in Japan.

⁶ For an overview of the general political framework of Japanese Buddhism, see Nariyoshi Tamaru, "Buddhism in Japan", in Mircea Eliade (ed.) (1987) *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ii, New York: Macmillan.

Japan's schools of Buddhism are generally categorised according to the historical period in which they emerged.⁷ The Nara period (710-84) saw the introduction onto Japanese soil of the six great Chinese schools, including the *Hua-Yen* and *Lu*, that became respectively the Kegon and Ritsu in Japanese. In terms of geography, the six sects were centred around the capital city of Nara.

In the Heian period (794-1185) the capital moved to Kyoto, and it is from this date that important changes and developments take place which result in the emergence of a more characteristically Japanese form of Buddhism. Two schools – the Tendai and the Shingon – particularly came to the fore, in time supplanting the other established schools, and laying the foundations for future developments.

During the early days, Buddhism had been closely connected to, and controlled by the state. Buddhist monks, in fact, were directly ordained at specific imperial *kaidans* (platforms for ordination) and acted as governmental officials. For a long period, the *kaidans* of Kyoto and Nara functioned as the principal training centres for monks. Within this institutional framework, the study of Buddhist teaching and, consequently, the training of monks, enjoyed a relative doctrinal freedom. A monk was expected to study all the various doctrines and disciplines to become well versed in the whole of the Buddhist teachings. In other words, this system was basically synthetic, and its synthetic character was apparent especially at Mount Hiei, the headquarters of the Tendai school established by Saicho (764-882). Founded by the Chinese monk Chih-i (538-97) and introduced to Japan by Saicho, this school laid special emphasis on the Lotus sutra, regarding it as the culmination of all other forms of Buddhism. The Lotus Sutra was taught together with other meditative practices and esoteric rituals,

⁷ Sources for this historical overview of Japanese Buddhist schools are: Joseph M. Kitagawa (1990) *Religion in Japanese History*. New York: Columbia UP. (86-131) ; John Bowker (ed.) (2000) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Oxford: Oxford UP; John Powers (ed.) (2000) *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oneworld.

which, in time, helped to make a decisive step away from the academic Buddhism of the early period, and toward a revived active kind of religion based on practical belief. Esoteric practices became influential to the point that they dominated the Heian period (794-1185) and had a decisive influence on the subsequent Kamakura period. Even the more philosophical Tendai school adopted esoteric rituals – such as the practice of conducting esoteric prayers for rain after a time of drought, giving Buddhist esotericism a magical attraction.

Towards the end of the Heian period, the dissemination of more popular devotional forms of Buddhism began, which were mainly derived from the Pure Land cult of Amitabha (Amida in Japanese). This was connected with the somewhat pessimistic philosophy of a deteriorating “final period of the dharma”, which became widespread during this time. The devotional cults basically propounded the notion that salvation was only possible through the intercession of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, for example through the recitation and repetition of simple formula such as the *Namu-Amida-butsu* (the mantra of the Nembutsu School). These forms of “new” Buddhism, which appeared during the years of transition to the Kamakura period (1192-1333) deserve special attention, since Nichiren Daishonin, on whose teaching Soka Gakkai depends as its sole basis and source of inspiration, was clearly a representative figure in this whole development.

In Japanese historiography, the Kamakura period is generally regarded as inaugurating the second major stage of the Middle Ages, the age of Japanese feudalism. Internal power passed from the hands of the landed aristocrats, living mostly in the areas around Kyoto, to the class of warriors whose base was in the provinces, especially in eastern Japan. Parallel to this sociopolitical upheaval, several trends appeared in Buddhism and gradually held ground. Whereas the “old” schools, already an integral part of the establishment, were supported mainly by the aristocrats and geared above all

toward *chingo kokka* (protection of the state), the new Buddhism addressed itself to the individual need for salvation.

It is worth noting that most leaders of Kamakura New Buddhism were once trained in the *kaidan* centre on Mount Hiei: Honen (1133-1212) and Shinran (1173-1262), representing the Pure Land school, Dogen, (1200-53), stressing the Zen discipline, and Nichiren Daishonin (1222-82). In contrast with the syncretic approach of the preceding period, they chose, each in his own way, a specific motive from among the wide variety of Buddhist teachings, and made it the sole basis of their practices, rejecting all other teachings. In other words, their orientation was fundamentally selective rather than syncretic and aimed at a simplification of religious life. To that extent the term *senju* (single practice), which Honen used as his motto, is symbolic of all the new trends (Tamaru, 2000: 20).

The first of the three great traditions of Kamakura Buddhism, the doctrine of the Pure Land, continued the development which had begun in the Heian period with the foundation of an independent Japanese sect, the *Jodo-shu*. The monk Genku (1133-1212), better known as Honen, maintained that enlightenment was no longer achievable by the strength of Man alone, and that the only possible way was to surrender to Buddha Amida and rebirth into the Western Paradise Pure Land. What was new in Honen's philosophy was that, while he recognized the scholastic apparatus of the Mahayana philosophy, he concentrated on an intensified religious feeling which found expression in the simple invocation of the name *Namu-Amida-butsu*, stamped by unshakeable faith in rebirth into Amida's paradise. Honen's successor, Shinran-Shonin (1173-1262) founded the True Sect of the Pure Land, *Jodo-shinshu*, which is the largest Buddhist sect in Japan today. In his chief work written in 1224, he explains that the doctrine, practice, belief and realization are all given by Amida Buddha and that nothing depends on *jiriki* (man's "own power"). Instead, everything depends on *tariki* (the "power of the

other”), namely that of the Buddha Amida. Shinran emphasized that the recitation of the *Namu-Amida-butsu* was simply the expression of thankful joy for having received everything from Amida. It is worth noting that Shinran was a monk who decided to take a wife, and thus he symbolizes a decisive turn in Japan towards lay Buddhism. He stressed that obedience to the Buddhist commandments and the performance of good deeds were not necessary to obtain deliverance; in fact it is precisely the bad man who can be assured of rebirth in Amida’s paradise if he wholeheartedly appeals to Amida.

While belief in Amida proceeds from the “strength of the other”, Zen Buddhism teaches that man can come to deliverance and Enlightenment only from his own strength (*jiriki*). Zen (Chinese Ch’an, from Pali, *jhana* and Sanskrit, *dhyana*) places supreme emphasis on self-power: on the active mobilization of all of one’s energies towards the realization of the ideal of enlightenment. The first Zen sect was created by the Tendai monk Eisai (1141-1215). During his studies in China, he had been introduced to the practice and doctrine of a branch of Zen which went back to the Lin-chi School (called Rinzai in Japanese), and on his return to Japan he started to disseminate the new doctrine. Eisai established firm relations with the new military government in Kamakura and the military caste that held sway there. They found the simple, hard and manly discipline of Zen more to their taste than the ritual and dogma of the old schools. In contrast to this, Zen Buddhism was greeted with less enthusiasm by the intellectual elite of cities such as Kyoto. There, established practice was represented by Tendai, Shingon and Pure Land with their beautiful rituals. The fierce demands of Zen, with its emphasis on personal effort and the promise of enlightenment rather than heaven, seemed disturbing to the elite. In general, the monks involved in the transmission of Zen from China to Japan also transmitted Neo-Confucian values and ideas. The Zen masters added a Confucian moral to Buddhist spirituality, which appealed to the new warrior-class of the Kamakura. For many centuries, the Rinzai

temples in Japan were centres of Chinese learning in general, and Neo-Confucianism in particular.

A second Chinese school of Zen, the Ts'ao-tung (Soto in Japanese), was introduced to Japan by Dogen (1200-1253). After four years of training in China under Master Ju-ching, Dogen returned to Japan in 1227, and eventually established the Eihei-ji temple in a remote province, which to this day remains one of the two main temples of the Japanese Soto Zen school. The foundation of Dogen's Zen is the constantly emphasized principle that practice does not lead to Enlightenment, but is carried out in the state of being Enlightened; otherwise it is not practice. In a logically constructed picture of the world, he equates all beings – the believer, his practice and the world – with the present moment, the moment of enlightenment.

After Pure Land and Zen, the final great reformer and sect-founder of the Kamakura period was Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282). Nichiren Daishonin's teachings are important to understand the modern Soka Gakkai mind (or "Soka Spirit" as members themselves define their vocation). In the history of Japanese Buddhism Nichiren's teachings occupy a unique position. They are distinguished from other schools by their pre-eminently political orientation, bringing Buddhism into the realities of social life, and by the firm sense of mission to achieve this goal by any means. It is a mentality rarely found elsewhere in the Buddhist world and may be called prophetic in the proper sense of the word (Tamaru, 2000: 21).⁸ Indeed, in the latter half of his life Nichiren came to regard himself as a prophet of the Lotus Sutra; a Bodhisattva who embodied the Buddha's mission to propagate the true teaching, as he clearly states in the treatise known as *The Opening of the Eyes* (WND: 280-98). This conviction seems

⁸ Here, the term "prophetic" is adopted to indicate a type of "universalistic" religion characterised by strong commitment to historical and social issues, and opposed to "mystic", which denotes a more introverted attitude. See also Masaharu Anesaki (1966) *Nichiren the Buddhist Prophet*. London: Oxford UP.

to have been strengthened by the repeated persecutions he suffered, in accordance with the martyrdom theory of *honan*, or “hardships suffered by a votary”. This activist spirit is clearly an integral portion of his legacy and can be found in a number of his followers, including the founders of Soka Gakkai (Murata, 1969: 39).

The demise of the Kamakura regime in 1333 inaugurated a new era of internal strife and fighting in Japan, which was to last into the seventeenth century. It also signalled the end of the truly creative phase of Japanese Buddhism. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the privileged relations of the Rinzai Zen sect with the military government permitted it to gain tremendous wealth. This led to the creation of what is known as the “Culture of the Five Mountains”, which constitutes the summit of Japanese Zen culture. It included all the arts, such as architecture, painting, calligraphy and sculpture, as well as printing, gardening, and medicine.

After the Kamakura period, the Tokugawa Shogunate was to rule Japan from its bastion in Edo (Tokyo) for over two and a half centuries (1603-1868). It was to be the longest period of peace, and for the most part, prosperity in the history of the country. This was basically achieved by closing the country to the outside world, and establishing a regime of inflexible authoritarian control that created stability and order, but stifled all creative change and innovation. The Buddhist clergy was under the strict control of the government, and it was forbidden to found a new sect or build a new temple without special permission. The Shogunate encouraged the Buddhist clergy of the sects in scholarly pursuits, hoping thereby to divert them from politics. Therefore a huge amount of learned literature was produced, and by the second half of the seventeenth century, editions of the Buddhist canon appeared, the most influential being that by Tetsugen (1630-1682), A monk belonging to the Obaku-shu sect. Obaku-shu had been founded in 1654 by the Chinese master Yin-yuan Lung-ch'i (1592-1673), a Rinzai Zen priest. It added a new flavour to Japanese Zen, not only by its syncretism (as

it mixed Zen doctrines with elements of Pure Land Buddhism), but also by the introduction of rituals, customs and a new architectural style imported from Ming China.

The restoration of the imperial regime in 1868 signalled the end of Japanese isolation. The pressure on Japan to re-open her doors simply became too great. There followed a temporary persecution of Buddhism when Shinto was made a state cult, however Buddhism was too firmly established in the affections of the Japanese people for this to last for long, and its religious freedom was effectively soon regained. For the first time in centuries, contact was made with other Buddhist countries, along with Western ones as well, and this served to encourage Buddhist scholarship, and various Buddhist universities were established by the first half of the twentieth century.

During the last 50 years, the evolution of Buddhism has been closely linked to Japan's history. The grip of the government during the Second World War over Buddhist institutions was rigid, and any writings in which Buddhism was placed above the authority of the state or the emperor were suppressed. The only opposition to this came from the Soka Gakkai, whose members were for that reason severely persecuted (Murata 1969 p. 80). Since the end of World War II Buddhism in Japan has once again revived, and many new sects have been founded, along with an ongoing reinvigoration as a result of sustained contacts with other peoples and cultures. Japanese Zen has also been successfully exported to many Western countries, in particular North America.

2.3. Nichiren Daishonin and the Lotus Sutra

Among the leaders of the new Japanese Buddhist movements originated in Japan during the Kamakura period (1192-1333), Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282) appeared

relatively late on the scene, and his teachings present a somewhat different character from those of other groups (Tamaru, 2000: 21). As mentioned in the previous section, each of these groups chose a specific element from the ample array of Buddhist features, and made it the core of their doctrine. This is clearly illustrated in their choice of sacred texts as the source and the norm of their respective views. Although a great number of texts were produced and codified in the course of Buddhist history, they did not always possess the status of a canon in the strict sense, and each Buddhist school could select certain texts and declare them to be authoritative for their doctrine.⁹ Thus, the Tendai sect regarded the Lotus Sutra as the final message of the Buddha, the Pure Land school replaced it with the Three Pure Land Sutras, the Zen schools further elaborated the Lotus Sutra and finally insisted on a direct transmission of the Buddha's Law outside the scriptures (Tamaru, 2000: 22). Many commentators (Murata, 1969; Tamaru, 1987; Watson, 1993) agree on the central position of the Lotus Sutra within the corpus of Mahayana Buddhism. As Murata (1969: 24-5) explains, its Sanskrit name, *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra*, can be translated literally as "the Lotus Sutra of the Right Law". The prefix *sat* (*sad*), is the present participle of a verb which means "to exist",

⁹ Gautama Siddharta, the Buddha (literally "the Enlightened One"), known in Japan as Shakyamuni, lived in India in the sixth century B.C. About a century after his death, his following split over different interpretations of his teachings. At the time of inception, around the sixth century B.C., Buddhism had represented a kind of innovative movement while inheriting some typical elements from the preceding stages of Indian religion. In the course of several centuries, however, it was gradually transmitted to the wide areas of South, Southeast and East Asia. As with other universal religions, the process of expansion and indigenisation necessitated a series of transformations in teaching and practice (Tamaru, 2000: 17). By the beginning of the Christian era, two major currents had emerged. One called itself Mahayana (Greater Vehicle), and referred to its chief rival as Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle), better known by its own designation, Theravada, meaning "the School of the Elders" (Conze, 1993: 41). In contrast with the monastic and meditative features of the Theravada tradition, Mahayana was lay oriented and popular, and led to a shift of emphasis in the religious system. As regards the elements of belief, the concept of the Buddha, which originally meant an enlightened person, came to assume an increasingly supernatural trait, finally resulting in the formation of a peculiar pantheon of many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Thus, Mahayana regarded the historical Buddha as one particular incarnation of the eternal, transcended Buddha nature, and maintained that each bodhisattva (a person who seeks enlightenment) could become a Buddha by working for the good of others through perfecting themselves in the six virtues of generosity, morality, patience, vigour, meditative concentration, and wisdom (43). A peculiar characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism is that it produced a large number of sutras which purport to record the Buddha's actual teachings, although they have been collected into a written form during the first two centuries of the current era. See also: Conze (1993: 4-42); Dumoulin (1976); Bowker (2000).

and is used in the sense of “present”, “existing”, “true”, “wonderful”, “right” or “superior”. *Dharma* means “law” or “teaching”. *Saddharma* was translated into Chinese as *miao fa* and as *myoho* in Japanese. *Pundarika* means “white lotus”, and the compound *saddharma pundarika* is understood to mean “the right law which is like the white lotus”.

It is an historical fact that the Lotus Sutra, disregarding the problem of its authorship, has played an eminent role in Japanese culture.¹⁰ The lotus is an important Buddhist symbol of purity and spiritual merit. It is used extensively as a symbolic ornament in Buddhist architecture, and artificial white lotus blossoms are often found in Buddhist funeral decorations. In Japanese culture the title of the sutra, *Hoke-kyo* (an abbreviation of *Myoho-renge-kyo*) is a household word, so familiar that the onomatopoeia for the call of the nightingale in Japanese is *ho-hoke-kyo* (Murata, 1969: 25) The very name “Nichiren” means literally “sun lotus”. Following this tradition, Soka Gakkai's main publication is entitled *Daibyakurenge* (Great White Lotus Blossom), and a branch of Soka Gakkai's female Youth Division is named *Byakuren*.

Although opposing the mainstream Tendai sect, Nichiren Daishonin did not discard the Lotus Sutra, on which the Tendai orthodoxy rested. Instead, he insisted upon its absolute supremacy over all other sutras. Nichiren went so far as to claim it to be the verbal expression of the supreme philosophy of the historical Buddha, and maintained that anyone committing themselves to the Sutra would be granted moral and material benefits and, eventually, Buddhahood. At the same time, Nichiren warned the faithful that they were bound to be persecuted in their attempts to propagate it. Nevertheless, those who fail to proselytise and those who persecute the faithful will receive divine retribution.

¹⁰ See George Tanabe Jr. and Willa Jane Tanabe (eds.) (1989) *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

According to Noriyoshi Tamaru (2000) Nichiren's movement "may be interpreted as an attempt at revitalisation and reform from within the Tendai tradition" (22). On the other hand, commenting on Nichiren's extreme simplification of doctrine, and the exclusivist tendency of his ideas, Takesato Watanabe (1987) holds that,

Although Nichiren remained fundamentally within the Tendai tradition, he is known as a reformer, if not a radical, who departed from many of the teachings of Saicho [...] he virtually reduced the Tendai doctrines to the sole practice of chanting the Daimoku (425).

After studying Pure Land and Zen teachings at the centres of traditional Buddhism on Mount Hiei and in Nara, Nichiren became convinced that the natural and social calamities that plagued the nation were caused by the disappearance of True Buddhism (Tamaru, 2000: 22). In order to restore the social order and to secure the welfare of people, he began to publicly denounce the inadequacy of all other Buddhist schools and to advocate a complete faith in the Lotus Sutra:

Because Buddhism has gradually been turned upside down, the secular world also has been plunged into corruption and chaos. Buddhism is like the body, and society is like the shadow. When the body bends, so does the shadow. How fortunate that all my disciples who follow the Buddha's true intention [the Lotus Sutra] will naturally flow into the ocean of comprehensive wisdom (WND: 1039).

Nichiren associated the creed that the Buddha nature is immanent in every aspect of reality and intrinsic to every living creature with the Lotus Sutra. Faith in this Sutra, he wrote, is the only effective means of salvation in the age of *Mappo* (the Latter Day of

the Law), in which the authentic teachings of the Buddha have fallen into general decay.¹¹

The Lotus Sutra is the king of Sutras, true and correct in both word and principle. Its words are the ultimate reality, and this reality is the Mystic Law (*myoho*). It is called the Mystic Law because it reveals the principle of the mutually inclusive relationship of a single moment of life and all phenomena. That is why this sutra is the wisdom of all Buddhas (WND: 3).

Nichiren introduced several novel elements to Buddhism, the most important of which are the *Gohonzon* and the *Daimoku*, the invocation *Nam-Myoho-renge-kyo*. The Lotus Sutra consists of twenty-eight chapters and is divided into two parts, the *shakumon* (section of manifestations) and the *honmon* (section of origin). The first fourteen chapters (*shakumon*) expound the sermons of the historical Buddha (see Watson, 1969: iii-xxvi). In Nichiren's vision, the remaining fourteen chapters (*honmon*) expose the teachings of the "eternal" Shakyamuni, the Truth itself, of which the historical Buddha was only one of the numerous manifestations (Tamaru, 2000: 25). Nichiren summarized the content of the *honmon* into the Three Secret Laws of *honzon*, *daimoku* and *kaidan* (Murata, 1969: 45-61).

Honzon, a Buddhist term designating the chief object of worship, by which Nichiren meant the eternal Buddha as revealed in the Lotus Sutra, has come to refer in Nichiren tradition to the Gohonzon, the peculiar mandala inscribed by Nichiren during his retreat on Mount Minobu:

¹¹ Buddhism taught that, after the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Buddhist teachings would go through three major periods of change: an age when the Law, or doctrine, would flourish, an age when it would begin to decline, and finally an age known as the Latter Day of the Law, when the doctrine would decline even further and ultimately lose its powers of salvation. Although there are different methods of calculating the duration of the three periods, the Japanese believed that they would enter the age of the Latter Day around the middle of the eleventh century. Their expectations seemed to be confirmed at this time by the declining power of the court, unrest in the outlying areas and other signs of decay in the social order (Murata, 1969: 33-4).

This Gohonzon is the essence of the Lotus Sutra and the eye of all the scriptures. It is like the sun and the moon in the heavens, a great ruler on earth, the heart in a human being, the wish-granting jewel among treasures, and the pillar of a house. When we have this mandala with us, it is a rule that all the Buddhas and Gods will gather round and watch over us, protecting us like a shadow day and night, just as warriors guard their ruler, as parents love their children, as fish rely on water, as trees and grasses crave rain, and as birds depend on trees. You must trust in it with all your heart (WND: 624).

At the centre of the *Gohonzon*, Nichiren inscribed the *daimoku* (invocation), i.e. the sacred title of the sutra, *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. As the *daimoku* was the quintessence of the sutra, and hence the absolute truth, its recitation was obligatory. Nichiren taught that one who takes faith in and chants *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* to the *Gohonzon* will definitely attain the same life condition that the Buddha himself possessed:

Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless *kalpas*¹² ago, the Lotus Sutra that leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from one another. To chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* with this realisation is to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death. This is a matter of the utmost importance for Nichiren Disciples and lay supporters, and this is what it means to embrace the Lotus Sutra (WND, p. 216).

Together with the *honzon* and the *daimoku*, it seems that Nichiren had planned the establishing of a special *kaidan*, a place of worship in which he could instruct people in his true teachings (Tamaru, 2000: 25). Although the *kaidan* was never realised in Nichiren's time, the *Sho-Hondo* High Temple was built in 1972 by Daisaku Ikeda, the current president of the Soka Gakkai.

¹² Kalpa (Sanskrit). An extremely long period of time. One explanation sets the length of a small kalpa at approximately sixteen million years.

According to Métraux (1992: 325-36), this particular achievement helped to spread the popular belief according to which Ikeda is Nichiren Daishonin's successor, and forced Nichiren Shoshu to eventually excommunicate the Soka Gakkai in 1991 (see also Chapter 3).

Nichiren was resolute in believing that his was the only true and efficacious religion for his day and that all other faiths would lead only to damnation. He lived in a desperate period of Japanese history. The country was beset by a series of disasters such as plagues, droughts, famines, typhoons, fires, earthquakes, uprisings and political plots (Métraux, 1986: 32). In 1260, Nichiren devoted a long treatise, the *Rissho ankokuron* (known in English as *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, WND: 6-26), to warn against other sects, which he considered as the source for all misfortune - social, political, economic and natural; and brought numerous petitions before the governing authorities of his day to urge them to adopt his precepts and discard other faiths. To Nichiren, the rulers who allowed the heretical practices of Shinto, Zen, Nembutsu and Ritzu were the direct cause of Japan's decadence:

The people of today all turn their backs upon what is right, they give their allegiance to evil. This is the reason that the benevolent deities have abandoned the nation and departed together, that sages leave and do not return. And in their stead devils and demons come, and disaster and calamities occur. I cannot keep silent on this matter. I cannot suppress my fears (WND: 7).

In the *Rissho ankokuron* Nichiren recommended the traditional notion that Buddhism was to be accepted as a political tool as well as a means to individual salvation. Trying to find the cause of the national calamities and social unrest in Japan, he came to the conclusion that a stable, peaceful nation could only come about after the correct Buddhist teachings had been totally accepted by the nation. This process could be started with the accession of an ideal ruler, a wise Confucian-Buddhist king, who was a

believer in the Dharma and who would lead the country to faith. As Métraux (1986) states:

Behind this concept lay the Confucian notion of rule by sages, which held that the national morality was dependent on the ruler's morality. If the ruler would convert, Nichiren felt, the country would become a true Buddhist nation.... Or Nichiren, two obligations coalesced: the Confucian duty of putting his wisdom to the use of the ruler, and the bodhisattva course of working for the salvation of all living human beings (33).

Thus, Nichiren advocated a highly aggressive form of proselytism called *shakubuku* (to break and subdue) which, though harsh, he believed to be the only way to overcome the depravity of his age (Tamaru, 2000: 25). Also, Nichiren Daishonin predicted that his Buddhism would spread from Japan to cover the world, and was convinced that the Japanese had the mission to propagate the Lotus Sutra under his guidance:

I will be the Pillar of Japan, I will be the Eyes of Japan, I will be the Ship of Japan, this is my vow and I will never forsake it" (WND: 280-81).

These peculiarly political and ethnocentric elements, James White (1970) remarks, "have provided a theological basis for many later Japanese nationalists"(34). Tamaru (2000), on the other hand, maintains that "this ethnocentrism reveals an implicit feel of inferiority – Japan being far removed from the homeland of Buddhism" (26).

In Japan the figure of Nichiren Daishonin is highly considered, as he founded the only major native school of Japanese Buddhism, severing its link from previous Chinese traditions (Murata, 1969: 66). Among the world's religious leaders, Nichiren distinguished himself by the large number of writings he left. Although he did not produce any major philosophical work, he produced more than seven hundred writings,

mainly in the form of letters to his followers reflecting the development of his thought at every stage (Murata, 1969: 28). Nichiren's letters and short treatises are known among his followers as the *Gosho*.¹³ The assessment of Nichiren's ideas is controversial: Edward Conze (1980) maintains that Nichiren Buddhism

differs from all other Buddhist schools by its nationalistic, pugnacious and intolerant attitude and it is somewhat doubtful whether it belongs to the history of Buddhism at all... On this occasion Buddhism has evolved its very antithesis out of itself (113-14).

Heinrich Dumoulin (1976) speaks of "almost fanatical zeal and prophetic wrath" (222); Andrew Skilton (1994) points out that Nichiren

went so far as to claim that all other forms of Buddhist practice were positively harmful, and agitated for their suppression by the rulers for the sake of the well-being of Japan. He identified himself with the Bodhisattva Visistacarita, praised in the *Lotus Sutra* by the Buddha as the Bodhisattva who will restore the true teachings after its future disappearance. Since he was repeatedly persecuted for his views and eventually exiled to the island of Sado, he also identified himself with the persecuted Bodhisattva Sadaparibhuta, from the same sutra (181).

Jacqueline Stone (1994), however, underlines the importance of contextualising Nichiren's life and Nichiren's traditions, and maintains that:

Nichiren exclusivism is far more complex than mere "intolerance". It has rarely been purely a matter of religious doctrine ... At any given time it has been intertwined with specific social, political, and institutional concerns. It served to crystallize resistance to various forms of political authority throughout the medieval time; was suppressed under Tokugawa rule, was revived with a

¹³ *Go* is an honorific prefix, *sho* means writing, thus the translation literally means "honourable writings".

powerful nationalistic orientation in Meiji, and has been refigured as the basis of a peace movement in the postwar years (255).

The teachings of Nichiren, gradually took root in Japanese society and have by now become firmly institutionalised. In fact, they constitute a large section of Japanese Buddhism together with the earlier groups of Tendai and Shingon, and the Pure Land and the Zen groups, which arose almost simultaneously.

2.3.1. Nichiren's Successors

It is important to underline that although each of them declares itself to be the sole Nichirenite School to have inherited the purity of Nichiren's teachings through his disciple Nikko Shonin (1222), there are in Japan at least 12 other active movements of Nichirenite derivation, such as the Nichiren Shosu School, the Nichiren Shu School, the Reyukai School and the Rissho Kosei-kai School (Murata, 1969: 41).

In the centuries after Nichiren's death, his followers splintered over different interpretations of his doctrine, thus giving rise to many schools and subsects of what may be generally called the Nichiren School. According to the Nichiren Shoshu's interpretation (a tradition continued within Soka Gakkai, cfr. WND: xvii-xxv), five days before his death on October 8, 1282, Nichiren summoned to his bedside his six most important disciples, a group known as the Six Senior Priest (*Roku Rosho*), and bequeathed his teachings to Nikko (1246-1333), the closest of his disciples. Nikko Shonin established the Nichiren Shoshu in 1290, when he founded the Taiseki-ji temple at the foot of Mount Fuji, and laid the basis for the elaborate doctrinal system of today's Nichiren Shoshu School with commentaries on and paraphrases of his master's thought

and theory. His collection of works, the *Ongi Kunden*, was, until the separation from the Nichiren Shoshu, one of the essential readings for members of Soka Gakkai.

The major difference between Nichiren Shoshu and other Nichiren sects is Nichiren Shoshu's claim that Nichiren is the true Buddha of the age of *mappo*, and the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Jogyo; other Nichiren sects claim Shakyamuni is the true Buddha. In Murata's view (1969: 67), the conviction of Nichiren Shoshu's theological superiority over other Nichiren sects strongly influenced the single-mindedness of Soka Gakkai's members in the evangelical work they consider their goal: the spreading of their version of Nichiren's teachings. Daniel Métraux (1994) explains the issue by means of a Christian parable when he writes:

Nichiren Shoshu holds that Shakyamuni was a precursor, a John the Baptist figure who brought Buddhist teachings to mankind, and that Nichiren himself was born in the age of *mappo* in its hour of greatest need (21).

Today, the Christian metaphor seems to have further developed. In a 1995 interview broadcasted by the BBC, in fact, Daisaku Ikeda, president of the Soka Gakkai, comments on the separation from Nichiren Shoshu and identifies himself with Martin Luther.¹⁴

Among the different Nichiren Schools stemmed from the Six Senior Priests, Nichiren Shoshu bases its claims of orthodoxy on a document known as *Minobu Sojoshu*, written by Nichiren Daishonin in September 1282 (Métraux, 1988: 26). The document states that Nikko was Nichiren's chosen disciple. Although the original document was lost after 1540, Nichiren Shoshu maintains that a copy has always been

¹⁴ "The Chanting Millions" by Julian Pettifer. BBC World News and Current Affair, 14 October 1995. A CD copy of the video recording is annexed to this dissertation. A copy of the text is provided in the Appendix.

preserved at the *Taiseki-ji* temple. In Buddhist tradition a key determinant of doctrinal succession is *kechimyaku sojo* (inheritance of blood), that is bequest of a Buddhist canon by a master to the single, chosen disciple. Sakyamuni the Buddha, for instance, is believed to have handed down his teachings to Maha-Kashyapa, who in turn bequeathed them to Ananda. The “inheritance of blood” therefore is of extreme importance to establish the orthodoxy of a Buddhist school and it is not surprising that the rival Nichiren sects claim that Nichiren Shoshu’s document is a forgery (Murata, 1969: 44).

Over the seven centuries following its founding, Nichiren Shoshu remained a small sect growing to some 40 temples by 1900. The number of temples increased to 131 by 1931, but the sect began rapid expansion after World War II, largely due to the propagation activities of Soka Gakkai. In 1991 the dramatic split between Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu reopened the *kechimyaku sojo* issue, with Daisaku Ikeda claiming that Soka Gakkai is the sole movement to have inherited Nichiren Daishonin’s tradition.

2. 4. Japanese Millenarianism

From a sociological point of view, the New Religious Movements are the answer to the crisis that invested Japanese society in four distinctive moments, namely the beginning of the nineteenth century; the general period surrounding the Meiji Restoration (1868); the beginning of the twentieth century; the period following World War II (Inoue, 1991: 411). Those moments marked the passage of Japan from a pre-industrial condition to its new identity as a nation leader in the domains of economy, industry and technology, an identity that has generated a profound social and religious sense of uncertainty.

From 1853 and until the end of the 19th century, Japan turned very quickly into an industrialised society, heavily influenced by Western models of economics, politics and education. By the late Tokugawa era, when the first new religions appeared, organised religion in Japan had become formalistic and stagnant. From the late Tokugawa times, and throughout the post-Meiji era, social and economic conditions were depressed for both farmers and city workers. The new religions found many of their leaders and members among the depressed classes, people who had suffered together and now shared their religious experiences (Earhart, 1969: 88).

At the turn of the twentieth century, a series of wars and industrial upheavals led to economic recession and to the rising of a nationalistic and fascist regime. Years of military expansion were to follow, which led to total war and, later, to the horrors of the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At the end of the World War II, Japan was desolate and in chaos, and had to endure seven years of foreign rule by an occupying army. Since the return to independence, however, Japanese progress has been staggering, and it is now one of the world's richest countries, a leader in industry and technology. All this has had a considerable effect on the lives of the Japanese, who, in a few decades, have turned to a race of city-dwelling industrialist from village-dwelling farmers (Reader, 1993: 11).

The economic and social crises helped stimulate a spiritual renewal of the older traditions in forming the NRMs, hundreds of which are active in the Japanese territory today (Inoue, 2006: 411). Japanese NRMs were not officially recognised as completely independent until after the end of World War II. Both the Tokugawa government and the later governments maintained a strict control over the religious sects. They went through varying phases of recognition and suppression until 1882, when the Meiji government promoted the *saisei itchi*, the unity of Shinto and the State. State-Shinto, which is itself a "new religion", having been established before World War II (O'Brien,

1996: 53), is a cult centred on worship of the *tenno* (the emperor seen as a “living god”).¹⁵ State Shinto recognised the existence – although in a subordinate position – of Buddhism, Christianity and of thirteen Shinto sects. Thus, to survive, many NRMs were forced either to operate within existing denominational lines or continue, without formal recognition, as semi-religious associations. After 1945, when complete religious freedom was enacted, both the formerly suppressed movements and other newly-formed movements organised freely and openly.

Post-war Japan had to struggle to invent, or re-invent, its forms of cultural identity, in the effort to accommodate the ever increasing tides of western cultural influences. As Clarke (2000) points out, Japan found westernisation more difficult to integrate and domesticate than previous waves of cultural penetration, such as Buddhism. Indeed, in the religious sphere, Buddhism and NRMs deriving from Buddhism have proven more apt to convey nationalistic sentiments, with their emphasis on Japanese cultural and spiritual predominance. (Cornille, 2000: 29-30; Gebhardt, 2002: 133-40).

In general, Japanese new religions have developed along two distinct lines, both of which revolve around the millenarian thought, that Peter Clarke (2000) defines as “the different ways in which people respond to disruptive social changes and interpret and explain various personal limitations and human and natural calamities, including earthquakes, defeat in war and great poverty” (129).

¹⁵ State Shinto must not be confused with Shinto. The term State Shinto, as Helen Hardacre (2006: 546)) points out, designates a political manipulation of Shinto, and is not a “natural” evolution of Shinto itself. State Shinto represents the Japanese effort to build a religious foundation for national unity (Gebhardt, 2002: 133). Stating that the emperor was “sacred and inviolable”, State-Shinto required compulsory participation in shrine rites, and the suppression of other religions that contradicted some aspects of Shinto. Shrine priests held that Shinto constituted a supra-religious entity responsible for carrying out the rites of the state. On this view, religions were the “mere” creations of human founders, and it was these which subjects were free to follow. The implication was that Shinto shrine observances, unlike those of Shinto sects, Buddhism and Christianity, were obligatory for everyone. Buddhism, Christianity, and thirteen sects of Shinto were officially recognised, allowing them to undertake missionary activity freely, but the numerous NRMs of the era fell outside this framework, leaving them vulnerable to harassment and suppression (Hardacre, 2006: 546).

At the most general level, millenarianism can function as a form of individual and social psychology, constituting sources of permanently valid truths about the destiny and the essentials of human happiness in terms of the self and the community (Clarke, 2000: 130). In Japan, millenarian movements arise as an answer to the quest for authenticity, the desire to re-appropriate genuine Japanese spirit at a time in which the country experienced large scale processes of westernisation, a process identified with material progress and arrogance in its attitude to the non-empirical world of mystical and spiritual power. The pursuit of authenticity could result either in the total rejection of modernity itself, perceived as detrimental to the Japanese soul, or in the search of a modernisation in a clear and distinct Japanese form (133). From Japanese millenarianism stemmed two lines of NRMs, which can be defined, following Wallis's categorisation, as "world denying" and "world affirming".

Movements such as the Agonshu and the Aum Shinrikyo are known in Japan for their vehement rejection of modernity, and for their syncretic nature, incorporating an emphasis on miracles and in the irrationalism rooted in Japanese folk religion (Reader, 2002: 14).¹⁶ These groups revolve around a series of millenarial beliefs, in which images of cataclysm or disaster have been juxtaposed with concepts of transformation, salvation and world renewal. The rhetoric that such movements have used in their promise of a new Buddhist revival is built on a series of nationalist images that place Japan at the centre of such world spiritual transformation, affirming the special destiny of the nation. As Reader (2002) notes, these movements have been regarded as

¹⁶ Agonshu and Aum Shinrikyo have been chosen here as an example in virtue of their wide popularity in Japan and (at least in the case of Aum Shinrikyo), in the whole world. Aum Shinrikyo, in fact, is known for having carried out sarin gas attacks in Japan in 1994 and 1995. Agonshu, from which Aum Shinrikyo originated, is a very popular new religious movement in Japan. The group, with a reputation for aggressive proselytizing, claims to base its doctrines on the Agama (Agon) Sutra, one of the earliest teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. The goal of Agonshu is to cut the karmic ties with the spirits of the dead, who afflict the living and cause spiritual hindrances and pollution. This movements is also famous for staging mass ceremonies in which huge bonfires are lit. It is claimed that these rituals serve to cut off massive amounts of karma for many people (Powers, 2000: 17).

appealing especially to urban-based younger, well educated Japanese as a result of “having tapped into general dissatisfaction with – and distrust of – the modern scientific rationalism that forms the basis of the Japanese education and work system” (15). These world-rejecting movements operate by providing a nexus of identity and confidence to their followers through which they can deal with many of the major problems in Japan. As Reader (1988) points out, the constant problem of relating to the outside while maintaining the identity of the inside is a highly problematic issue for many contemporary Japanese. The relationship between tradition and modernity in Japan has often been expressed in categorical terms of Japanese (tradition) as opposed to Western (modernity). This dichotomy between Japan and the West led to “subliminal implications that the relationship between these aspects results in an erosion of the purity of traditions” (257). Thus, many new religious movements provide a structure through which the past may be presented in modern contexts. For example, Agonshu interpretation of the social problems and disturbances of the present as due to failures to correctly observe the traditions of the past and to failure to properly venerate the ancestral spirits can be seen as a more general criticism of the way in which the past has been interpreted in Japan. By criticising established Buddhism for having lost sight of the true methods of transforming ancestors into Buddhas, Agonshu is implying that problems occur when cultural traditions are not properly understood, observed, and respected (Ibid.).

Thus, the millenarism of these new religions is seen as an expression of the hostility towards Western cultural incursions into Japan, and as a re-appropriation of the ancient Buddhist tradition, and in particular of the concept of karma. Through the concept of karma, both in individual and collective terms, these movements understand why the world is faced with cataclysm in the modern day. Kiriyama Seiyu, the founder and leader of the Agonshu, predicted that from the 1970s onwards a series of disasters

and catastrophes would occur as a result of the collective karma of humanity, which includes the spirits of the dead for whom the correct memorial services have not been performed. The eradication of this accumulated karma can only be achieved through spiritual practices and ritual to “cut the negative karma that has accrued on individual and collective levels” (Reader, 2002: 17). According to Asahara Shoko, who, after quitting the Agonshu founded the Aum Shinrikyo group, the solution for the world problems could come only through ascetic practices for karmic cleansing at the individual level, and – on a wider level – through more drastic means (Ibid.). The group’s highly negative view of the world evolved into a deeply aggressive perspective in which mass destruction was eventually viewed as an inevitable part of the salvation process.

Millennial beliefs, and a strong nationalistic ideology characterise groups deriving from Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism as well. The Nichirenist movement of Tanaka Chigaku (1861-1939), for instance, revolves around the idea of *kokutai* (national polity). As Eiichi Otani (2002) describes,

kokutai can be defined as the ideology that legitimates modern Japan as a nation-state, and as Tanaka negotiated the connection between *kokutai* ideology and Nichiren Buddhism, he designed a specifically Japanese national identity from a Nichiren Buddhist point of view” (76).

Kokutai pertains to the knowledge system used to justify the authority of the Emperor system.¹⁷ This ideology became implicit among the Japanese people by spreading

¹⁷ As Otani (2002) explains, the Emperor system is based on the idea of the Japanese Emperor as a Messiah, and reinforced by the *amateratsu-hitsugi*, the belief in a living god which permeated the consciousness of the Japanese people. Japanese historiography of the period emphasised the myth as an actual, literal history (77).

through its formulation in state ceremony, education, army, mass media and other forms.

During the first half of the twentieth century Japan had continued to follow the path of imperialism which had begun in the previous century with the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895. As a result of the war Japan gained control of Taiwan, Korea, and other territories. The Japanese were victorious again in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, annexed Korea in 1910, and created a puppet state in Manchuria in 1932. Japan's ambition to create a Japanese Empire culminated in the war with China which began in 1937 and expanded into a war with the United States and Great Britain after the attack at Pearl Harbor in 1941 (McCormick, 2002).¹⁸ As a result of these events, the myth of the modern Emperor system was diffused and fixated in the consciousness of the Japanese people (Otani, 2002: 77). During the war, religious dissent was not tolerated, and in 1937 the Ministry of Education published the *Kokutai no Hongi* (Cardinal Principles of the Nation) which declared the divinity of the Emperor and the obligation of the Japanese people to sacrifice themselves for the good of the nation. State Shinto was the ideology of Imperial Japan, and the Buddhist establishment was given no choice but to support it. Some Buddhist schools did not simply comply reluctantly with State Shinto. Rather, they enthusiastically promoted a movement called *Kodo Bukkyo* (Imperial way Buddhism), which taught that Japanese Buddhism was superior to all other forms of Buddhism (McCormick, 2002).

From the beginning of the 1900s Tanaka prophesized that Nichiren Buddhism would become the established religion of Japan, and worked towards the systematisation of a doctrine centred on the adaptation between Buddhism and *kokutai* ideology. Buddhism was thus identified with the state, and the state was identified with the Emperor. In Tanaka's view, to worship and serve the Emperor was the same as

¹⁸ Ryuei Michael McCormick (2002). *Nichiren Buddhism in the 20th Century*. Electronic source. <http://nichirenscoffehouse.net/Ryuei/nichiren budd_20th.html>

worshipping and serving the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma (the Law) and Sangha (the Community of Believers) (Otani, 2002: 82). His movement strongly advocated a return to the more hard line methods of *shakubuku* in propagating Nichiren Buddhism. Tanaka emphasised *shakubuku* as a compassionate method to break people free of debilitating false views about Buddhism:

The heart of my plan is the complete restoration of the original [Nichiren's] doctrine, while simultaneously establishing a progressive institutional structure. Moreover, we must maintain an aggressive attitude at all time.¹⁹

He was convinced that lay Buddhism was the way of the future, and in an attempt to create a modernised lay Buddhism he founded a series of lay organisations. In many ways, as McCormick (2002) points out, Tanaka and his Nichirenite lay Buddhist movement were an inspiration for later groups, such as Rissho Kosei Kai, Reiyukai and, in particular, Soka Gakkai.²⁰

2.5. THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF A NEW RELIGION

From its early roots in Japanese millenarianism, Nichiren's Buddhism develops a new identity through the work of three outstanding figures, Tusunesaburu Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda. Under their vision, Soka Gakkai was born and conceptualised as a "universal religion" ready to be disseminated outside the confines of Japan.

¹⁹ Tanaka (1901) quoted in Eiichi Otani (2002: 79).

²⁰ On the development of New Religious Movements of Nichirenite derivation, see McCormick (2002).

2.5.1. Soka Kyoiku Gakkai

Soka Gakkai as a distinct organisation owes its birth to an elementary school teacher, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) who in the 1930s created an organisation called Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value Creating Educational Society). The original goal of the group was to organise educators and promote a value-based educational system in place of the rote learning emphasised at that time. Central to the founding of this association was his four-volume research, *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (The System of Value-Creation Pedagogy) published between 1930 and 1934 (Bethel, 1973: 41). Modern Soka Gakkai members consider the date of the publication of this book to be the official beginning of the pre-war organisation (Murata, 1969: 77). Makiguchi's role is often minimised in popular accounts of Soka Gakkai, but his humanist ideas and vision of value creation were to have a very important influence upon the organisation's later development.

According to Makiguchi, Japanese education was "unplanned, fragmented and purposeless" (Bethel, 1973: 47). The Japanese educational curriculum, elaborated through imitation of the Western system, had resulted in a fixed curriculum of orderly subject matters, based partially on the past and partially on the newly introduced scientific subjects of the West, which children were expected to master through drill and repetition. Makiguchi believed that under these conditions the educational experience of children consisted of little more than memorisation of material unrelated to their lives. Thus, the great potential of each child was not being developed and nurtured:

A pupil asks his teacher, "What is this?" And if the teacher says: "You mean to say that you still don't know what it is?" he is definitely confusing the process of cognition and evaluation. The pupil who asked the teacher the question did not seek a judgment on his own competence. He was seeking information, not an

evaluation of his own ability. The teacher who does not answer the pupil's real question but diverts his attention to something else is intimidating the child, and yet he thinks he is thus helping the child's comprehension. ... Under a teacher of this kind, a poor pupil cannot but become even a poorer pupil.²¹

The central motivation of Makiguchi's philosophy of education was thus to "save the children of Japan from being victimised by the deplorable inadequacies of traditional Japanese education and to assure that oncoming generations of Japanese children will not have to suffer its devastation" (Bethel, 1973: 79). As an alternative to Japanese traditional education Makiguchi suggested what he called "cultural education", an educational system based on his own theory of value, which he articulated in the second volume of *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei*.²² In this work Makiguchi argues that the conventional triad of truth, beauty and goodness could not help mankind to overcome misery and unhappiness, because "truth" does not necessary lead to what is itself of value, as it merely indicates factual reality (Wilson and Dobbeleare, 1994: 9).²³ Consequently, Makiguchi stressed three cardinal values: benefit, beauty, and goodness (the satisfaction, respectively, of material, spiritual, and altruistic desires) and stated that the pursuing of these three values could lead to the achievement of supreme happiness.

²¹ Makiguchi quoted in Murata (1969: 78).

²² Makiguchi's *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* was translated into English by the Soka Gakkai's Overseas Bureau Translation Division as: *Makiguchi Tsunesaburu. Philosophy of Value. Revised and enlarged by Josei Toda* (1964) Tokyo: Seiko Press. On Makiguchi's theories see among others: Bethel, D.M. (1973) *Makiguchi the Value Creator: Revolutionary Japanese Educator and Founder of Soka Gakkai*. New York: Weatherhill.; Bethel, D.M. (ed.) (1989) *Education for Creative Living: Ideas and Proposals of Tsunesaburu Makiguchi*. Ames: Iowa State University Press.; Shimazono, S. (1995) "Makiguchi's Educational Philosophy and Life-based Knowledge". *The Journal of Oriental Studies* 5 (38-47).

²³ Striking in the uniqueness of this system is the elimination of "truth" as a value. For Makiguchi, truth and value operate on completely opposite planes. He defines "truth" as "a concept that objectifies the relationship between a being such as a man, and something in his environment" (as quoted and translated in Murata, 1969:77) , whereas "value" is "the subjective relation between a person and the object discussed" (ibid.). Thus, for Makiguchi "truth" has no real relation to human life. Instead, our lives should consist of the creation of values "because they represent man's relationship with his environment"(ibid.). lives should consist of the creation of values "because they represent man's relationship with his environment"(ibid.).

Makiguchi defined the happy individual as “one who maximises his potential in his chosen sphere of life and who helps others maximise theirs” (Métraux, 1994: 21).

Throughout his work Makiguchi advocated an educational reform, not a religious organisation. Murata’s research (1969) reveals that neither his attachment to his family religion, Nichiren Shu, nor his mild interest in Christianity could be considered as evidence of a serious concern with or attention to religious matters as such (76). In fact, in the earliest version of *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* Makiguchi firmly rejected the idea, advocated by the contemporary German philosopher Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915) of the existence of a fourth absolute element, God, besides truth, beauty and goodness, thus articulating a form of relativism that seems incompatible with his faith in a religion that claims to be absolute truth (Murata, 1969: 78). Makiguchi’s conversion to Nichiren Shoshu seems to be related to a seemingly “minor accident” in 1928, when Makiguchi was introduced to the principal of a Tokyo business high school. The man, who was an influential member of one of the Nichiren Shoshu’s major temples, converted Makiguchi to his sect.

Thus, although Soka Gakkai claims that the origins and basis of Makiguchi’s thought lay in the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu, when Makiguchi joined the Nichiren Shoshu his basic concepts and ideas had already been formulated. As Dayle M. Bethel (1973) points out, there is some debate on whether Makiguchi’s successor, Josei Toda could have altered Makiguchi’s texts to affirm the absolute truth of Nichiren Shoshu, considering that at the time of this work’s publication Makiguchi was fairly new to Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, having been introduced to it only three years previously (42).

Soka Gakkai reissued Makiguchi’s *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* in 1953, under the title of *Kachiron* (Theory of Value), enlarged and revised by Josei Toda. Murata (1969: 79-80) underlines how the author’s tone of argument suddenly changes in one section

of the book, shifting from an abstract, nonreligious, philosophic discourse to specific references to Nichiren and the Lotus Sutra. The section, originally written in 1931, was probably altered by Toda in the 1953 reprint edition, since it contains references to nuclear physics and the atom bomb that Makiguchi obviously would not have mentioned. The debate on the originality of Makiguchi's work underlines that the tension between being a religious organisation and a secular enterprise, and between relativism and sectarianism were manifest in Soka Gakkai's earliest seeds. The 1953 edition stresses the connection between Makiguchi's values of benefit, beauty and goodness and Nichiren religion, seen as the only logical and valid faith which could enable human beings to create these three categories of value. The author maintains that Nichiren Shoshu religion is "the only profound philosophy that transcends every scientific study and makes the true character of human life clear", and that "all religions other than Nichiren Shoshu contradict scientific knowledge and logic, because they are not 'true religions'" (*Kachiron* quoted in Murata, 1969: 79).²⁴

After the publication of *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* Makiguchi began to create an institutional structure to promote his ideas. In 1937 he founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Educational Society for the Creation of Value). The original small group of educators, who gathered to talk about their educational researches and personal experiences, rapidly expanded and in 1941 the society numbered some four hundred members (Murata, 1969: 80).

It is unclear at what point under the leadership of Makiguchi Soka Kyoiku Gakkai took on its religious character. However, by the late 1930s the society had

²⁴ "For instance, it is not strange that it is impossible to give a scientific explanation of Christianity – according to which a virgin gave birth to a child, and [Christ] is found walking around after his death – because its basis is erroneous. Therefore if one must claim such a religion to be correct, he must despise science, and hence religion and science must find themselves in conflict with each other". (*Kachiron*, quoted in Murata, 1969: 79).

become a Nichiren Shoshu religious *ko* , or “lay study organisation” (68).²⁵ Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was not alone in being a lay group of Nichiren Shoshu’s adherents, however, its unique character consisted in its secular attempts to create value, and in the charisma of Makiguchi’s leadership.

In 1941 Soka Kyoiku Gakkai began publishing a monthly periodical called *Kachi Sozo* (the Creation of Value). Along with articles about value-creating pedagogy, the magazine featured testimonials of people who claimed to have found various benefits as the result of adhering to Nichiren Shoshu religious practice, or of membership in Soka Kyoiku Gakkai.²⁶ Another feature of *Kachi Sozo* was an admonition to members to participate in *shakubuku* activities, and to convert people. According to Bethel (1973), the ideology expounded in the magazine contrasts markedly with Makiguchi’s theories of a decade earlier (97).

World War II led to increasing official attempts to enforce national unity in Japan. In 1940 the government had introduced the Religious Organisation Law, which gave the state control over religions. The specific objective of this policy was to unite all Nichiren schools in the war effort. As Murata reports, while some of the Nichiren Shoshu priests favoured a merger into the dominant Nichiren Shu school, and accepted to worship the tablets of the Grand Shrine of Ise (Japan’s most important Shinto temple) to prove their loyalty to the emperor system, lay believers decided against the merger and asked for government authorisation to remain independent. In *Kachi Sozo*, Makiguchi declared that lay believers should “exhort the government, ban the evil religions, and spread the correct faith” (82).

²⁵ Historically, the *ko* was a study session in which Buddhist priests read Buddhist scriptures in the imperial court during the Heian period (794-1192). The term was applied later to any small, local group of adherents to a common faith, and today defines “an association of lay worshippers of a deity which happens to have a nationwide membership” (Murata, 1969: 68).

²⁶ The first issue of the magazine, for example, contains a group testimonial of twenty-seven mothers claiming that, as a result of joining Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, they had experienced painless childbirth (Bethel, 1973: 97).

The Japanese government suspended the publication of the magazine after the ninth issue in 1942. The following year, Makiguchi, his assistant Toda, and nineteen other people – the entire upper-echelon leadership of the organisation, were arrested and jailed for their vehement opposition to the State Shinto (Bethel, 1973: 98). In 1944 Makiguchi died of malnutrition at the age of seventy-three. It is unclear if Makiguchi died while still in prison or if he had been released the day before his death (Murata, 1969: 84). Daisaku Ikeda, current president of Soka Gakkai International writes that Makiguchi died in jail and, despite his failing health, refused to renounce his faith in the face of “cruel interrogation, repeated torture, and humiliation that ignored the basic human rights”.²⁷

According to one commentator, Soka Gakkai’s version of Makiguchi’s death is “one of the most broadcast and accepted legends about this organisation” (J.M. Flagler, quoted in Murata, 1969: 84).²⁸ Probably, as Bethel (1973) suggests, at the moment of his death Makiguchi had been transferred from his isolation cell to the infirmary of Sugamo Prison (98). Soka Gakkai’s celebration of Makiguchi death suggests an attempt to idealise the figure of the founder in accordance with Nichiren’s theory of *hōnō*, which claims that the true Votary of the Lotus Sutra will endure hardship and martyrdom (Murata, 1969: 39).

²⁷ Quoted in Murata (1969: 84).

²⁸ As Murata (1969: 84) reports, the American writer J. M. Flagler interviewed Daisaku Ikeda in 1966. (J. M. Flagler “A Reporter at Large: A Chanting in Japan”, *The New Yorker*, November 26, 1966, p. 187 strengthening” or “anxiety producing” disappear like the chimeras they are, and one is left with 187). Although Soka Gakkai claims that the interview never happened, the author maintains that Ikeda confirmed that Makiguchi had not died in prison, as he had been released because of his poor health.

2.5.2. Soka Gakkai

After Makiguchi died, Josei Toda (1900-1958) came to realise that his task was to propagate his mentor's faith. Toda and Makiguchi had met in 1920, while working at the same primary school in Tokyo. Toda had joined Nichiren Shosha with Makiguchi's encouragement, and was one of the founding members of Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Bethel, 1973: 99). Toda was a Japanese businessman who had experienced dire poverty and a series of tragedies in his life, including the death of an infant daughter and the loss of his wife from tuberculosis. His fortunes began to improve with the publication of a series of books to help students preparing for middle-school entrance examination. By the time of his arrest in the summer of 1943, Toda controlled seventeen business companies, and had become an extremely wealthy man (Bethel, *Ibid.*).

While in prison Toda began a profound study of the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, together with the constant repetition of the *daimoku*. Murata (1969) describes how, as a result of his prayers Toda reported having a powerful experience which demonstrated to him the validity of Nichiren's thought: after two million repetitions, an "extremely strange sensation" seized him, and "a world which I could never see before unfolded itself in front of me." His body shaking with ecstatic joy, Toda stood in his cell and shouted to "all Buddhas, all Bodhisattvas, and all common men of the world" that he had now found, at the age of forty-five, "the true meaning of life" (89).

As a consequence of this experience, Toda decided to devote himself to the diffusion of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. After his release from prison in 1945, he set about the twofold task of rebuilding his business empire, which had been completely destroyed, and gathering together the fragments of Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, instilling in his followers a spirit of vigorous proselytism. Toda renamed the organisation as Soka

Gakkai (Value Creating Society), dropping “educational” from its title, since he sought to expand its mission outside the field of education to reach society as a whole. He also changed the direction of the group’s teaching and activities. Whereas Makiguchi had stressed his theory of value and the responsibility of the individual to learn how to evaluate, or create value, properly, Toda transformed Makiguchi’s educational idealism into a unique Buddhist religious movement. Since he was convinced that the organisation had disintegrated because its members had been weak in doctrinal discipline, he gave the organisation a more religious direction, stressing the pursuit of happiness and the efficacy of the Lotus Sutra, and in particular the chanting of its title (*daimoku*) and the *shakubuku*, the action of teaching others.

By committing himself fully to the organisation, he in effect became a full time religious leader and, to symbolise his new start, he changed his name from Jogai to Josei, which means literally “castle righteousness” but also sounds as the ideogram meaning “saint” or “holy” (Murata, 1969: 91). Under his leadership, Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu’s priesthood became an inseparable entity. The clergy took on the role to legitimize worship through its doctrinal support, to perform funerals and other rituals, and to provide Soka Gakkai’s members with authenticated replicas of the *Gohonzon* for household and local branch use, while Soka Gakkai provided the priests with income, buildings, and adherents (Murata, 1969: 95).

The collaboration between Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu resulted in the important achievement of collecting and translating into modern Japanese the mass of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings. In 1952, to commemorate the seven hundredth anniversary of Nichiren’s Buddhism, Toda initiated a publication project which was carried out under the editorial supervision of the scholar Nichiro Hori, who had served as fifty-ninth Nichiren Shoshu High Priest of the Taiseki-ji temple before retiring in order to devote himself entirely to his research on the originals and copies of Nichiren’s

writings (WND: xxxi). A total of 462 documents were collected in one volume and published by the Nichiren Shoshu under the title of *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*. Between 1979 and 1995 Soka Gakkai produced the first English translation of the *gosho* in a seven-volumes series entitled *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*.

When Toda assumed the presidency, Soka Gakkai was just one among many new religious movements that had spread after the end of World War II. H. Neill McFarland (1967) describes this period as “the rush hour of the gods”. In his book bearing this title, he writes:

Prior to 1945, the Japanese people suffered through a long period of totalitarianism, during which religious bodies were either suppressed or regimented as thought-control agencies. Hence, at the end of the war, when complete freedom of religion was guaranteed as one of the cardinal principles in Japan’s new day, the way was open for innumerable captive and incipient religious movements to become independent sects and for new “prophets” to let their voice be heard (p. 4).

If in 1951 few Japanese had ever heard of Soka Gakkai, by the end of the decade the reverse was true, and in 1960 it was difficult to find a Japanese who had not formed some opinion about Soka Gakkai (Bethel, 1973: 105). Under Toda’s leadership conversions were numerous, and by the time of his death in 1958 the membership was 750,000 households (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 10).

Soka Gakkai’s wide success among post-war population was due to an important innovation. By likening the *Gohonzon* to a “machine which produces happiness” (Murata, 1969: 107) Toda emphasised the act of *daimoku* as a means to achieve secular benefit. Soka Gakkai is eminently practical and wordly in its orientation. As Reader (1995) underlines, the main difference perceived by Westerners converting to a Japanese religion today, is the specific and pragmatic link between religion and concrete

everyday activities (5). Groups such as Soka Gakkai stress lay participation, organisation and leadership, and offer personal support to their followers through frequent small group meetings. Adherents are encouraged to realize and solve their problems through prayer, ritual and encouragement from fellow members.

Divine benefit in daily experience has always been the core of Soka Gakkai appeal. Its doctrine revolves around the principle of *esho funi*, the inseparability of the individual and his or her environment. The twin themes of *kudoku* (divine reward) and *genze riyaku* (benefit in this world) such as happiness, recovery from illnesses, and financial prosperity recur incessantly in Soka Gakkai literature and in the testimonials of members (Macioti, 2002: 21). Those benefits can be attained through a set of simple actions and symbols, and the accumulation of such benefits is seen as the actual proof to testify the effectiveness of the religious practice. In a brochure addressed to its new converts, Soka Gakkai describes itself as follows:

The objective of Soka Gakkai lies, first of all, in teaching the individual how to redevelop his character and enjoy an happy life, and in showing all mankind how eternal peace can be established, through the supreme Buddhism, the religion of mercy and pacifism. Through this supreme religion, a person can escape from poverty and live a prosperous life, if only he works in earnest. A man troubled by domestic discord will find his home serene and happy; a man suffering from disease will completely recover his health and be able to resume his work. Through the power of the *Gohonzon*, a mother worried with her delinquent son will see him reform, and a husband who is plagued with a neurotic wife can have her return to normalcy. We often hear of a man whose business is failing and who, after being converted to Nichiren Shosha, has a brilliant idea, or makes a contact with an unexpected customer and begins to prosper again. Most people are afflicted with various problems – either spiritual, physical or material, but everyone who believes in the *Gohonzon* can solve any

problem and achieve a happy life. Men who are timid or irritable can gradually become normal before they become aware of the change in their character.²⁹

In Toda's view, divine reward could be obtained only through the personal realisation that "every religion other than Nichiren Shoshu is an evil religion" (Murata, 1969: 99).

The same brochure continues by stating that:

The true intention of the Daishonin is to save the whole world through the attainment of each individual's happiness in life. Consequently, members of Soka Gakkai are actively trying to make, first of all, the Japanese people realise this great Buddhism as soon as possible. But there is no nationality in religion. Nichiren Daishonin made a wonderful prediction about seven hundred years ago: "As the Buddhism of Shakyamuni found its way to Japan from India by way of China, conversely Our Buddhism will return from Japan to India by way of China". Without a doubt, the Buddhism of the Daishonin will spread all over the East in the near future, and finally through the whole world. World peace as well as welfare of individual nations can be achieved only when the true religion is made the basic thought. If you take this Buddhism as the guiding principle of your daily lives, the happiness of the individual will be closely reflected in the prosperity of the society in which you live. Each country can achieve prosperity without any harm to, or discord with, any other country. This is the spirit of *Kosen Rufu*, and the Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai is positively striving to achieve this sublime purpose.

Toda's radical form of proselytisation contributed to the creation of Soka Gakkai's negative reputation throughout Japanese society. Soka Gakkai's stated purpose is *kosen rufu* (the planetary diffusion of Nichiren's teachings) which had to be achieved through a strong act of *shakubuku*. In July 1951 Toda had launched the *Shakubuku Dai-Koshin*, or Great propagation Drive. For this purpose, a group of 187 young Soka Gakkai

²⁹ Soka Gakkai brochure (Tokyo: the Seiko Press, 1966) reprinted in Ian Reader (1993). *Japanese New Religions: Past and Present*. Sandgate, Folkestone, Kent: Japan Library. (142-43).

members formed the Youth Division, inaugurated by Toda in the same year. The group served as a spearhead of the great *shakubuku* march, that earned Soka Gakkai both notoriety and an unparalleled increase in membership. As James White (1970) reports, from a membership of about three thousand persons in April 1951, Soka Gakkai grew to 5,728 families (two to three members in each family) by the end of the year. The number of families rise to 22,324 by the end of 1952, and to 70,000 families in late 1953 (40).³⁰

Shakubuku is a forceful and aggressive method of conversion. White (1970) describes it as a practice which advocated visible activities in public spaces, as well as repeated attempt to convert co-workers and family by means of verbal pressure, menaces and an instilled sense of guilt:

On occasion Gakkai members would surround a home and make noise until one family member agreed to join. Or they would belabour a mark with argument and exhortation for hours on end. Sometimes threats of divine punishment were used: dire injuries and calamities might be predicted as the cost of resistance to the True Religion; a child's illness or death might be traced to the parents' heretical beliefs. In such instances, the fear of punishment instilled in a mind weakened and made receptive by hours of pressure could lead to the collapse of the subject's critical faculties and intellectual defences, and to his acquiescing to the demands of the proselyters (82).

In 1954 the Youth Division numbered 10,390 members, divided into thirty *butaiki* (corps) and commanded by fifteen *butaicho* (corps commander). On May 9, 1951 the thirty corps conducted a major parade at the Taiseki-ji temple. As Murata (1969)

³⁰ Within Soka Gakkai the household is used as the unit for tallying membership. This method may have been adopted because one of the criteria for membership is to have a *Gohonzon* (the object of worship), and also on the assumption that, in general, an entire household prays to the same *Gohonzon*. Because of this usage, the exact membership figures probably cannot be ascertained, even by Soka Gakkai itself (Aruga, 2004: 100).

reports, Toda, mounted on a white horse, reviewed the columns and addressed them as follows:

In our attempt at *kosen rufu* we are without an ally. We must consider all religions our enemies, and we must destroy them. Ladies and gentlemen, it is obvious that the road ahead is full of obstacles. Therefore, you must worship the *Gohonzon*, take the Soka spirit to your heart, and cultivate the strength of youth. I expect you to rise to the occasion to meet the many challenges that lie ahead (100).

During the aggressive *shakubuku* campaign that followed the parade, members of the youth division attacked temples of other Buddhist sects, Christian churches, and headquarters of new religions. They challenged their adversaries to debates, on the understanding that the loser write a statement of apology. Such apologies collected in those years are still kept by Soka Gakkai to testify to the vigour of the youth division in its early days (Murata, 1969: 99).

The extreme measures of these activists earned Soka Gakkai a very bad reputation in the press, with headlines such as “Violent Religion May See Bloodshed”, “Youth in Gang Challenges by Argument”, or “Strange Menace in Religious World” (Murata, 1969: 100). Soka Gakkai’s recruitment practices also attracted scholarly attention : in their 1965 study entitled *I Figli del Sole, mezzo secolo di Nazifascismo nel mondo*, Angelo del Boca and Mario Giovana define Soka Gakkai’s Youth Division as “la più autentica espressione del neo-fascismo giapponese” (372). According to them, a member of the division was also responsible for having made an attempt on the life of the Japanese Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda on 5 November 1963, claiming that Ikeda’s policy would “destroy Japan by spreading Communism throughout the Country” (352-53). On the same line of thought, James Dator (1969) writes that “many have looked at the military-like organisation of this group and concluded that it is definitely aimed at

organising the Japanese people into a religious army to compete with the two great military blocs of the world” (17). On the other hand, Bethel (1973) holds that Soka Gakkai’s leadership never encouraged extremism, and underlines that, on a number of occasions, both Toda and his disciple Daisaku Ikeda “cautioned against the use of force and violence in carrying out *shakubuku* activities” (108). Daniel Métraux (1994) maintains that “there was a tender side to Toda and the other Gakkai leaders” (23), and stresses “Toda’s own familiarity with the post-war suffering of the Japanese, his genuine ability to counsel the many miserable people who came to his doors and his hard work and organisational abilities” (Ibid.) as the crucial elements for the success of his group. When he died, Toda had become a nationally known figure whose funeral was attended by many of Japan’s ruling elite, including Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi together with 250,000 members of Soka Gakkai from Japan and abroad (Murata, 1969: 116).

Josei Toda died on April 2, 1958. The exact nature of Toda’s fatal illness has never been officially disclosed by Soka Gakkai, but it is probably related to the diabetes that he had developed in prison fifteen years before, and to a liver weakness connected to Toda’s heavy drinking habits (Murata, 1969: 115). Again, Soka Gakkai celebrated the death of its leader with mention to the *honan* theory of martyrdom, and Toda’s illness was explained as the effect of the *sansho shima* (three obstacles and four devils), which challenge the faith of the true Votary of the lotus Sutra (Murata, 1969: 116).

2.5.3. Daisaku Ikeda

Many of the members of the Youth Division of 1951 are the top leaders of Soka Gakkai today and of its political party, Komeito, the “clean government party”, which,

founded in 1964, claims to be above bribery and corruption and is today the third largest political party in Japan (Aruga, 2000: 114). Among these young men was Daisaku Ikeda (1928-), who had joined Soka Gakkai at the age of 19 and quickly passed through the ranks of the organisation. Ikeda came to be known as a fearless and eminent *shakubuku* campaigner. In 1954 he was appointed chief of staff of the Youth division, and became the third president of the Soka Gakkai after Toda's death. Like the first two presidents of Soka Gakkai, Ikeda was arrested and in 1957 experienced life in prison and interrogation by public prosecutors. In the course of Osaka general elections, in fact, Soka Gakkai had presented a candidate and was directing all the Youth Division efforts to sustain his political campaign. Ikeda and another leader were arrested on charge of having violated the election law by distributing money among voters (Murata, 1969: 123).

As Murata reports, "Soka Gakkai treated the affair as an instance of government suppression, and through its organ *Seikyo Shimbun*, urged members to strengthen their faith and to resolve to withstand official repression" (ibid.). In 2007, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his arrests, Ikeda published an editorial on the theme of religious freedom. In the article, Ikeda parallels his experience to that of South African leader Nelson Mandela (who spent 27 years in jail struggling for human rights) and declares that "the first Soka Gakkai's president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the second president Josei Toda and myself have been unjustly accused and jailed for our fight to defeat arrogance and falsehood" (NR 379: 3).



Fig. 1. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, Daisaku Ikeda

Today, Ikeda is a prominent figure in Japanese society who also enjoys international recognition. Ikeda was the driving force behind the growth of Soka Gakkai's school system, and behind the Komeito, which soon became the second-largest opposition political party in Japan.³¹ Also, he is the spiritual architect who took the firm foundation developed by Toda and transformed Soka Gakkai into a strong national and international movement. Under his direction, Soka Gakkai established chapters in more than one hundred countries. Jane Hurst (2000) parallels Ikeda's vision of spreading Japanese Buddhism throughout the world to the vision of Japanese businesses in their plan to make Japan part of a global economy. She writes:

In 1960, before the first Toyota or Datsun rolled onto American shores, Daisaku Ikeda had formally established the organisation, Soka Gakkai, that would disseminate the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin in North America. It was the first successful Japanese import not only to the United States but also to countries throughout the world. Soka Gakkai's description of its practice, "world peace through individual happiness", made it clear that its focus was global (75).

In time, many of the new religions flourished in post-war Japan have disappeared under the mutated political and social circumstances. As the next chapter is going to illustrate,

³¹ Komeito and Soka Gakkai became independent entities in 1970 (Métraux, 1994: 36).

the key for the success of Soka Gakkai lays in Ikeda's understanding that, to survive, a new religion needs to balance its traditional role with the modern, diffused idea that religion should be directly involved with social action. New converts may be attracted by the promise of immediate and visible benefit, but their presence must be motivated by the reassurance that their engagement in the movement is functional to the realisation of social prosperity at large. Thus, under Ikeda's leadership Soka Gakkai has struggled to accommodate tradition and modernity, has gradually softened its nationalistic character and developed a new identity in line with the modern stream of "Engaged Buddhism", which advocates a direct involvement of Buddhism in all spheres of society.³²

³² The term "Engaged Buddhism" was coined in the 1970s by the Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh as a way of asserting that Buddhism should not be passive or otherworldly. On the contrary it should be compassionately involved in every aspect of society where suffering arise. See also Susan Moon (ed.) (2004) *The Practice of Engaged Buddhism*. Boston: Shambala Publications.

FROM EAST TO WEST: SOKA GAKKAI ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES

Soka Gakkai is a religious movement which originated and matured under specific historical, geographical, and social conditions. Today, however, its tenets are embraced by more than two million people worldwide – people who, quite obviously, do not share the same language, history, or cultural assumptions that attended the movement's birth and initial development in Japan.

Studies on Soka Gakkai's adaptation in the West (in particular, Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994; Hammond and Machacek, 1999) have underlined how the SGI attracts followers because of what they perceive to be the organization's strong message of peace, happiness, success, and self-empowerment. According to surveys (Hurst, 1992; Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994; Hammond and Machacek, 1999; Wilson, 2000), many adherents believe that the type of Buddhism expounded by the Soka Gakkai is empowering in that it allows them a greater degree of control over their personal environments. In addition, they say that they are firmly convinced that through their hard work and devout practice they can overcome their suffering and find happiness in the here and now. They also experience great satisfaction and a sense of community by joining with other people who follow the same faith. Indeed, the practice of having small groups of members meeting together regularly to pray, to discuss personal and mutual concerns, and to socialise as close friends is an important social reason for the success of Soka Gakkai, both in Japan and abroad.

3.1. Peace, Culture and Education

In the wake of Daisaku Ikeda's assumption of leadership in the 1960s, Soka Gakkai began to moderate both its radicalism and some of its more extreme conversion tactics (Hammond and Machacek, 1999: 96). Ikeda attempted to produce a balance between the sectarian intensity of Toda and the relativist humanism of Makiguchi. Additionally, he took Toda's limited pro-peace ideals and expanded them into a huge global initiative.

Ikeda's first strategy was to reshape Nichiren Shoshu's doctrines to better adapt them to the Western religious system. In particular, Soka Gakkai came to emphasise the principle of *zuiho bini* (adapting the precepts to the locality) which postulates that Buddhism can be taught according to the particular characteristics of a certain society.¹ As a doctrinal source for *zuiho bini*, Soka Gakkai often quotes this passage from Nichiren Daishonin's *gosho*:

When we scrutinise the sutras and treatises with care, we find that there is a teaching about a precept known as "following the customs of the region" that corresponds to this. The meaning of this precept is that, so long as no seriously offensive act is involved, then even if one were to depart to some slight degree from the teachings of Buddhism, it would be better to avoid going against the manners and customs of the country. This is a precept expounded by the Buddha (WND: 72).

¹ For a definition of *zuiho bini* see: Nichiren Shoshu International Center (ed.) (1983) *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts*. Tokyo. Now online at:
 <<http://www.sgi-usa.org/lexicon.cgi?exact=on&term=>>

Composed in 1264, this letter was written specifically to discuss the observance of Japanese rituals of purity, and in particular the religious taboo forbidding women access to Buddhist temples during their menstrual period (WND: 74). Soka Gakkai universalises Nichiren's thought. In its view, the actual application of *zuiho bini* implies that Nichiren Shoshu's rituals and precepts can be modified when introducing the religion to foreign cultures.² The notion that individual lives can be transformed by chanting *gongyo* and *daimoku* is the same. What will vary is the manner in which the teachings are presented, how members are recruited, and how the local SGI chapters adapt themselves to the host culture.

The Soka Gakkai interprets the concept of *zuiho bini* to mean that the Buddhist doctrines apply to all people at all times. This, in turn, requires the ideological replacement of *shakubuku* by a less aggressive method of conversion known as *shoju*, a term which is defined as "a method of propagating Buddhism by gradually leading a person to the true law without refuting his attachment to lower or erroneous teachings".³ The new practice de-emphasises the labelling of other groups as heretical, and represents instead a less public practice based around discussion groups. Additionally, *kosen rufu* is reinterpreted as the propagation of world peace, and not the conversion to the sect. As one of Soka Gakkai's vice presidents states:

The doctrines of Buddhism have global application. Buddhism can help mankind attain greater respect for peace, the environment, and human dignity. It can lead to a reduction of greed, hatred and folly. If we confined the propagation of Buddhism to Japan, even if we somehow converted the entire population, our Buddhist revolution would fail because evil would still govern the rest of the

² On Soka Gakkai's interpretation of *zuiho bini* see also: Hurst, 1992: 143; Métraux, 1994: 121.

³ For a definition of *shoju*, see: *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts*.
<http://www.sgi-usa.org/lexicon.cgi?exact=on&term=>.

world. The crises facing mankind will only improve when people everywhere experience their own human revolutions.⁴

World peace, environmental concerns and education are the central themes of the modern Soka Gakkai movement. During the first years of his presidency, Ikeda's efforts were devoted to resurrecting the central elements of Makiguchi's philosophy of value and his value-creating pedagogy and to establishing a large number of educational and cultural ventures (Bethel, 1973: 110). In 1964, Soka Gakkai began establishing elementary schools, primary schools, and secondary schools in Japan. Soka University was founded in 1971 in Tokyo, with the expressed goal of realising Makiguchi's philosophy, which emphasises the need for an holistic education where special attention is paid to the personal development of each individual student. Soka University's mission, as expounded in its Founding Charter, is to:

- Be the highest seat of learning for humanistic education
- Be the cradle of a new culture
- Be a fortress for the peace of humankind.⁵

Similarly, Soka University of America, which opened in California in 1987, aimed to:

- Foster leaders of culture in the community.
- Foster leaders of humanism in society
- Foster leaders of pacifism in the world.
- Foster leaders for the creative co-existence of nature and humanity.⁶

⁴ Nishiguchi Hiroshi, Soka Gakkai vice president, quoted in Métraux, 1994: 122.

⁵ *Art of Living* (SGI-UK), n. 68, February 2007: 23.

⁶ *Art of Living* (Ibid.: 24).

Soka Gakkai takes great pride in its educational system, and links its educational and cultural efforts to its supreme goal, which is the realisation of a lasting world peace through the spreading of its Buddhism. Soka Gakkai centres its world view on the *Rissho ankokuron*, the treatise in which Nichiren Daishonin expounds his vision of establishing a peaceful and harmonious world once humankind has accepted the sacred teachings of the Lotus Sutra. In a 1962 public lecture on the *Rissho ankokuron*, Ikeda states that:

All people in the world desire the tranquillity of their land; they wish to be happy and peaceful throughout their whole lives. Therefore, many philosophers, thinkers and leaders have made efforts for the achievements of this state. This is the reason for the growth of religion. But disasters did not cease, wars broke out, and misfortune came in succession. This is because they did not know the highest Buddhism in the world. Now, the Soka Gakkai alone knows the fundamentals, and so I positively state that it must be bravely advanced for the benefit of the individual, Japan and the whole world, making others understand the Daishonin's Buddhism.⁷

As Bethel (1973) explains, in Soka Gakkai's interpretation of the *Rissho ankokuron* the idea of *Rissho* (establishing True Buddhism) should underlie *Ankoku* (securing the peace of the land) (111). *Rissho* is related to religion, whereas *Ankoku* is applied to society, and implies concepts such as social prosperity, people's happiness and world peace. In Soka Gakkai's view, "faith will not manifest itself directly in social activities. Instead, faith must find expression in the formation of character or in the principles such as respect for life. In this manner, faith is reflected in social activities (Ibid.).

Thus, Soka Gakkai's peace movement is based on the premise that enduring peace can only be achieved when there is a fundamental change in human character.

⁷ Daisaku Ikeda (1962) *Lectures on Buddhism*. Tokyo: Seikyo Press. (p. 269).

Human beings are plagued by evil karma, and thus trapped in a world of misery and suffering. Their fate and state in life can be improved only if there is an improvement in their karma. Likewise, society has a collective karma which is the sum of all the individual karmas that compose its makeup. A central teaching of Buddhism is that of social interdependence, the idea that all living beings share the world together and that an action affecting one being will have an effect on all others (Mètraux, 1994: 113). The quality of society will therefore necessarily improve as each individual karma does. Ikeda refers to this principle as “the human revolution”(*ningen kakumei*).

The concept of “human revolution” encompasses the goal of reforming institutional structures. It asserts that the way to reform social institutions – that is, to improve education, promote tolerance, and end war – is through individual enlightenment. In his *The Human Revolution* (1967), a twelve-volume novel describing the growth of Soka Gakkai in post-war Japan, Ikeda writes that “Nothing is more precious than peace. Nothing brings more happiness. Peace is the most basic starting point for the advancement of humankind” (1). He further declares that:

A great revolution of the character in just a single man will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, will cause a change in the destiny of all humankind (iv).

Soka Gakkai claims a long history of anti-war activities. Its pro-peace activities began in 1957 when Toda published his “Atomic Bomb Ban Proclamation”, an article in which he “condemned nuclear weapons as an absolute evil that threatened human existence and called on youth to launch a movement to disseminate the truth that

anyone who resorts to the use of nuclear weapon is a diabolical fiend”.⁸

Soka Gakkai illustrates its peace philosophy as follows:

Dr. Johan Galtung, a prominent peace advocate, once spoke about the relationship between peace and karma, or the Buddhist theory which explains how potential energies residing in the inner realm of life manifest themselves as various results in the future. He said that in contrast to the thinking that peace can be preserved if the bad person apologises for his deed, Buddhist teaching maintains that it is irrelevant to find fault or to blame, since all people have a common karma. He said that war cannot be eliminated if the perpetrator apologises. He observed that human karma itself is the problem.

The same is true of nuclear weapons. The problem cannot be solved by getting rid of them physically, although their elimination is a condition for a solution. The know-how of producing nuclear weapons remains with us forever. The essential solution to the nuclear threat lies in unceasingly combating the “diabolical nature” of man which threatens the right of the very existence of mankind. A way must be found to transform human karma.

In a letter to his disciples, Nichiren Daishonin states: “Life itself is the most precious of all treasures. Even the treasures of the entire universe cannot equal the value of a single human life”.

At a time when confrontation between ideologies is coming to an end and when the nature of state sovereignty is being questioned, the Buddhist philosophy implicit in president Toda’s declaration against atomic and hydrogen bombs undoubtedly will take on added significance.⁹

In Soka Gakkai’s view, then, conversion to Nichiren Buddhism will generate a mental and cultural reformation of one’s character as well as the character of society as a whole. Toward this goal, the movement has initiated wide and multifaceted activities at

⁸ www.sgi-italia.org/chi/pace.html.

⁹ As quoted in Métraux (1994: 114). The original article appeared in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, September 7, 1991.

the international level to gain public visibility and to transform its religious ideals into social reality, specifically in the field of educational, cultural, social, and peace-promoting programs. Today, it is a NGO (non-government organisation) member of the United Nation and sponsors a variety of initiatives highlighting its concern for peace and human rights.¹⁰

3.2. Buddhism or “Ikedaism”?

Daisaku Ikeda seems to be tireless in his efforts to propagate Soka Gakkai’s view outside Japan. Every year since 1987 he has written peace proposals in which he “explores the interrelations between core Buddhist concepts and the diverse challenges global society faces in the effort to realise peace and human security”.¹¹ Ikeda travels extensively to provide guidance to members and to speak at Soka Gakkai chapters in other countries. His visits abroad are an opportunity to meet international public figures, such as prominent politicians and academics, with whom he engages in dialogues on peace that frequently result in book publication.¹² Soka Gakkai’s official website emphasises Ikeda’s encounters with prominent figures such as Deng Xiaoping, Zhou

¹⁰ For a complete list of Soka Gakkai’s cultural initiatives, see the official website <www.sgi.org>, which lists several institutions founded with the aim to “promote mutual understanding through cultural expression” such as the Min-On Concert Association (founded 1963), the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum (founded 1991), and *La Maison Littéraire* Victor Hugo, in France (founded 1992). In addition, Soka Gakkai organises exhibitions to be circulated in all the countries where a Soka Gakkai chapter exists: two photographic exhibitions, “Nuclear War: Threat to Our World” and “War and Peace” were sponsored by the United Nations. “The Courage to Remember: Anne Frank and the Holocaust Exhibition” was organised with the Simon Wiesenthal Centre. “Toward the Century of Humanity: An Overview of Human Rights in Today’s World” was organised at the UN office in Geneva to commemorate the forty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the USA. From the year 2001, the exhibit “Gandhi, King, Ikeda, a Legacy of Building Peace” is circulating in all major European cities.

¹¹ <<http://www.sgi.org/about/president/works/proposals.html>>

¹² A list of Ikeda’s publications is provided in the appendix.

Enlai and Jiang Zemin in China, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Czechoslovakian President Vaclav Havel, former Secretary General of the United Nations Kurt Waldheim, as well as such American political figures as Edward Kennedy and Henry Kissinger. There also have been dialogues with such cultural and intellectual figures as Arnold Toynbee, Rene Huyghe, John K. Galbraith, Johan Galtung, and André Malraux.¹³

But the effective value of Soka Gakkai's peace activities is unclear. As Métraux (1986) notes:

One must wonder what these "voyages of peace" have accomplished. Have they helped the process of peace in even the remotest way? In the case of China, the answer is a qualified yes, but one must be sceptical of the values of the other encounters. There is certainly no harm in having meetings with leaders of other nations. But there is no other indication of their "peace value" other than being a symbol of the need for world leaders and other leading citizens to open up lines of communication (50).

The obvious beneficiaries of these encounters are Ikeda himself and Soka Gakkai. Both seek public respect and acceptance, and have been subject to criticism for decades. Public visibility is sometimes obtained through a *faux pas*. For example, unpublished in Soka Gakkai's official document but visible in a number of websites, are photos of Ikeda in the act of conferring "humanitarian awards" to a number of controversial figures such as former Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu and Panama dictator Manuel Noriega.¹⁴

¹³ Worldwide, Soka Gakkai's official websites are constantly updated to report about Ikeda's international appearances, university addresses, public speeches, and honorary degrees. A list of major websites is provided in the bibliography.

¹⁴ See for example < <http://ww2.netnitco.net/users/jqpublic/issues.htm>>. The Ikeda-Noriega relationship is also discussed in Métraux (1994: 160).

The figure of Daisaku Ikeda is not easy to define. He is “one of the more controversial figures in Japan’s modern history, the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of contemporary Japanese society” (Métraux, 1994: 147). Recalling a 1984 meeting with Ikeda, Métraux (1986) describes him as a man who exudes an aura of authority and seems to relish his power and prestige, but also adds that:

On the other hand, one gets the impression that he is very intelligent, by nature a kind man who cares deeply for those under him, who is sincere in his religious convictions, and who really wants to exert his power and influence for the public good. ... One can readily call into question the intrinsic value of his peace efforts, but it would be harder to question his sincerity (52).

Indeed, Ikeda is deeply revered by his members as a leader and teacher, and as a symbol of the Soka Gakkai. Jane Hurst (2000) recalls the early days of Ikeda’s leadership, when his charisma was already winning the hearts of his members, and describes him as “an intense, sincere and driven leader” (89). She comments that:

Members honoured him as their Sensei, their spiritual master, and when 10,000 members sang “Forever Sensei” in his honour at the 1976 Bicentennial Convention, they did so from the heart. He certainly has the ego of any successful CEO who has watched his organisation grow. It is remarkable that as he has matured as a leader, he has chosen the moral high ground (89).

In the eyes of an external viewer, however, the veneration that surrounds Ikeda can be very disturbing. Polly Toynbee, a British journalist for the *Guardian* and granddaughter of historian Arnold Toynbee published in 1984 an article (see appendix) in which she reports of her encounter with Ikeda and describes the scene as follows:

The doorway was flood-lit with camera lights, and there stood Mr. and Mrs. Ikeda, surrounded by bowing aides and followers. ... There he stood, a short, round man with slicked down hair, wearing a sharp Western suit. Camera bulbs flashed, movie cameras closed in, and we were carried away with the throng, past corridors of bowing girls dressed in white to an enormous room...¹⁵

The figure of Ikeda himself seemed both to frighten and to alarm Toynbee:

Our host's style of conversation was imperious and alarming –he led and others followed... Worldly, he seemed, down to the tip of his hand made shoes, earthy almost, without a whiff of even artificial spirituality. Asked to hazard a guess at his occupation, few would have selected him as a religious figure. I have met many powerful men... but I have never in my life met anyone who exuded such an aura of absolute power as Ikeda. He seems like a man who for many years has had his every whim gratified, his every order obeyed, a man protected from contradiction or conflict. I am not easily frightened, but something in him struck a chill down my spine (Ibid.).

The Soka Gakkai media portray Ikeda as saintly hero, a “crusader for world peace” and a “hope for suffering humanity” (Métraux, 1994: 162). Ikeda is often paralleled to great figures of the past, as in the brochures for the photographic exhibit “A Legacy of Building Peace”, where Ikeda is portrayed together with Gandhi and Martin Luther King. These brochures feature articles about Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of Truth and Non-violence.¹⁶ Soka Gakkai emphasises how Gandhi was able to launch a massive movement of common people that ended foreign imperialism in India and furthered social equality in order to suggest a parallels with its own Buddhist theory. It

¹⁵ Polly Toynbee. “The Value of a Grandfather Figure”. *The Manchester Guardian* May 19, 1984. Also at <www.rickcross.com/reference/gakkai/gakkai39.html>. A copy of the article is provided in the appendix.

¹⁶ The Italian version of the brochure “Gandhi, King, Ikeda. Maestri di Pace”, can be seen at <http://www.sgi-italia.org/cosa/mostra_cp.html>.

insists that, like Gandhi in India, it, too, is a force for world peace and greater human dignity. Soka Gakkai portrays Ikeda as a prophet who, like Gandhi, is imbued with a wisdom that can save humanity from the horrors of a decaying world.

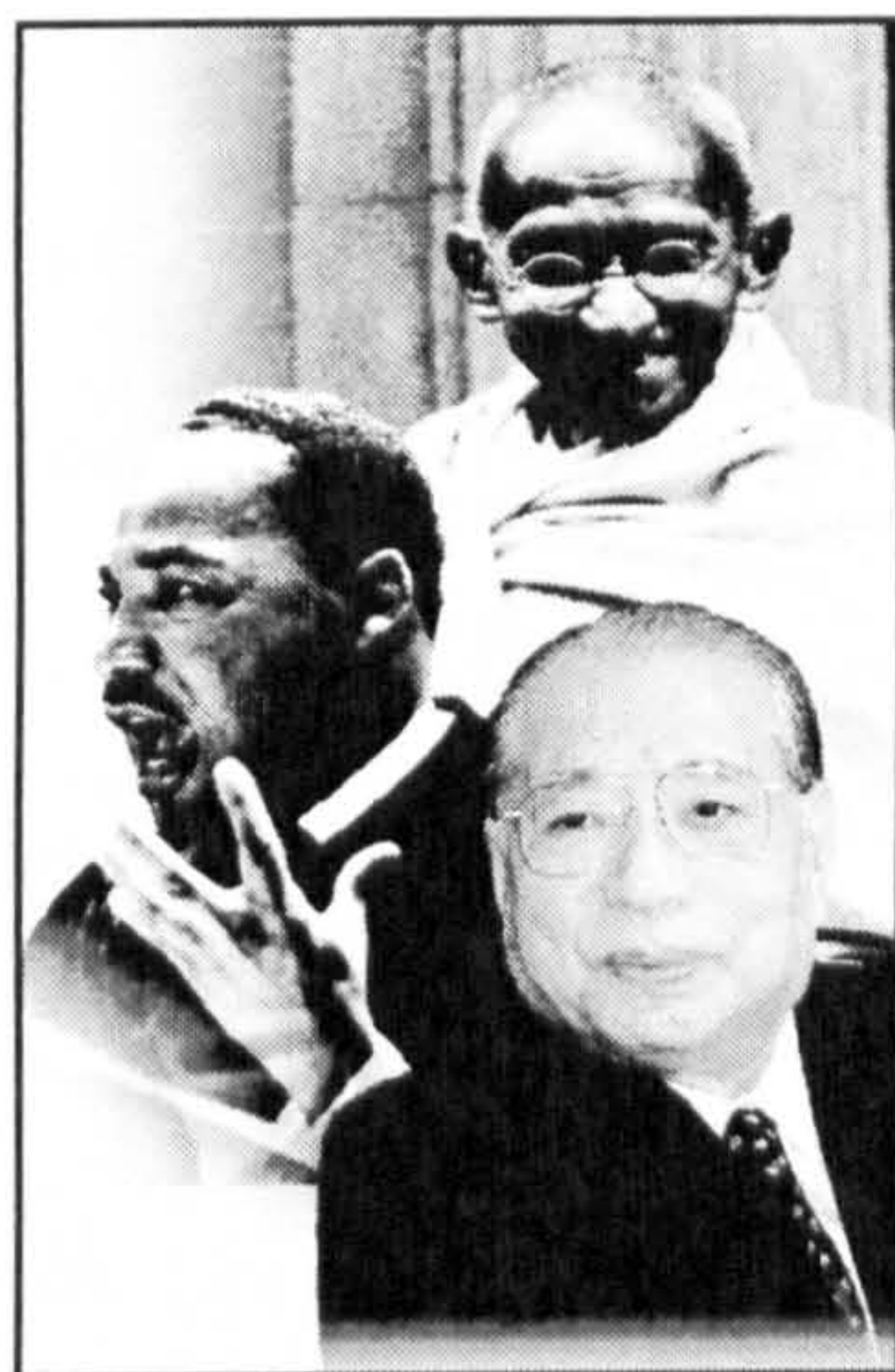


Fig. 2. Gandhi, King, Ikeda. Maestri di Pace

Ikeda himself seems to encourage these parallelisms. In a video featuring a general meeting at Soka Gakkai Headquarters, he announced:

This morning I received a report from SGI-USA Men's Leader Tariq Hasan ... [who] told me that beginning of next spring Hofstra University in New York will offer a course titled "Gandhi, King, Ikeda: A Legacy of Building Peace". We have now entered an era when our Soka Gakkai movement for peace and non-violence has become a subject of scholarly research in the exalted company of such figures as Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I hope you will

all be proud of the path we are walking. Leading thinkers around the world are applauding our activities, our history and our victories.¹⁷

Soka Gakkai's members see Ikeda as an inspiring religious leader who employs his considerable influence to further the cause of human understanding. To his critics, however Ikeda is "a conniving power-seeker who uses the votes and money of his million of followers to advance personal ambitions" (Métraux, 1994: 47). For example, Polly Toynbee reports that on her arrival in Japan she had no clear idea of why Ikeda had invited her and her family to take part in the Soka Gakkai celebration. By the time she left, however, all was clear to her:

We had been taken to be interviewed by newspapers and television. ... Each interview in which we appeared bound Ikeda and Arnold Toynbee together in the public eye. Ikeda was making a firm bid to become the chief official Toynbee friend and spokesman. I had no idea of the extent of my grandfather's fame and importance in Japan. ... My grandfather never met Ikeda on his visits to Japan. His old Japanese friends were clearly less than delighted with Ikeda's grandiose appropriation of his memory, on the basis of handful of rather vague interviews in extreme old age (Ibid).

Polly Toynbee was curious to understand how Ikeda managed to meet so many foreign intellectuals and politicians. She suggests that Soka Gakkai's non-governmental status at the United Nations gave Ikeda access to heads of state around the world:

At Soka Gakkai's Founder's day, we found representatives of many foreign embassies, and the French ambassador was the guest of hour. People who seek influence in Japan cannot afford to ignore Ikeda, and indeed his own book sports pictures of himself meeting people like Edward Kennedy, John Galbraith, and

¹⁷ Soka Gakkai Headquarters' Leaders Meeting, 7 December 2006. The speech is published in *Art of Living*, n. 68, February 2007, pp. 41-9 (48-9).

Presidents from every continent. ... Back in England I telephoned a few people round the world who had been guests of, or who had been visited by Ikeda. There was a certain amount of discomfort at being asked, and an admission by several that they had been drawn into endorsing him. A silken web is easily woven, a photograph taken, a brief polite conversation published as if it were some important encounter.

3.3. The Crisis Between Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu

Ikeda can be credited with the large-scale peace efforts which have become so important to many contemporary Soka Gakkai members. Under his guidance, Soka Gakkai founded in 1993 the Boston Research Centre for the 21st Century, the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research (in 1996) and the Institute for Oriental Philosophy (in 1961) with branches in Tokyo and London. Through these achievements, Soka Gakkai has become much more than a religious organisation: Bryan Wilson and David Machacek (2000) define it as “a large system for the dissemination of culture and value-creation, which operates in a manner unique in Japanese history” (3).

Ikeda's charisma, together with his personal interpretation of Nichiren Daishonin's doctrine, is one of the causes which led to the breakdown of the relationship between Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu, in 1991. Métraux (1980: 58-59) maintains that tensions between Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai date back to the mid-1970's, when Nichiren Shoshu began to realise that Ikeda and Soka Gakkai had grown so powerful that it threatened to devour its parent sect. In fact, under Ikeda presidency Soka Gakkai had registered a spectacular increase in membership, shifting from the 1,050,000 families registered in 1958, the year Toda died, to 6, 240,000 families in 1967 (Murata, 1969: 124). During the same period, the organisation had changed its structure and

activities, establishing a Culture Bureau, incorporating the newly created Economics, Politics, Education, Arts and Speech departments. As Bethel (1973) notes, the Culture Bureau, centred on a non-religious sphere of activities, was the first step toward Soka Gakkai's full-fledged participation in the nation's politics, and testifies Ikeda's strategic ability to prepare Soka Gakkai's future diffusion as a planetary movement (110).

On several occasions, Nichiren Shoshu priests had demanded more authority over individual members, more control over organisational decisions and religious dogma, and a diminished role for Ikeda within the movement (Métraux, 1980: 58). The crisis with the Nichiren Shoshu emerged clearly when some Soka Gakkai leaders and members began to "deify" Ikeda. Some went so far as to assert that Ikeda was the "true Buddha". This idea goes back to the Nichiren Shoshu conviction that Nichiren Daishonin was the "true Buddha", and that Gautama the Buddha was a precursor. Nichiren wrote that his ultimate objective was to convert all Japanese (and by extension all humankind) and, on completing this task to build a "National Hall of Worship" (*kaidan*) at the foot of Mount Fuji. These goals were not attained during Nichiren's lifetime, and before his death Nichiren called on his followers of later generations to complete these tasks. It was the Soka Gakkai, however, under Ikeda leadership that developed a broad national following and built the temple known as the *Shohondo* in Fujinomya, at the foot of Mount Fuji. The *Shohondo* temple, eighteen stories tall with more than 110,000 square feet of interior space, had been built from the donations of nearly 8 million of Soka Gakkai members and cost 100 million dollars. Apparently, some officials and members of Soka Gakkai began to assert that Ikeda was the "true Buddha" (Métraux, 1980: 59) or the reincarnation of Nichiren Daishonin himself (Hurst, 2000: 76) citing Ikeda's accomplishments as evidence.

In April 1979 Ikeda was forced to resign from his position as president of the Soka Gakkai, but remained on the scene as President of the Soka Gakkai International

(henceforth, SGI), the organisation that he had founded in 1975. During the following years, Ikeda's ever-growing charisma, and his firm decision to modify Nichiren Shoshu doctrines in order to "bring the movement into the twentieth century" (Métraux, 1980: 59) led to a conflict which culminated in a massive excommunication of Soka Gakkai by the High Priest Abe Nikken.¹⁸

As a consequence, Nichiren Shoshu priests would no longer perform weddings or funerals, or bestow *Gohonzon* through Soka Gakkai. Soka Gakkai would no longer support the priesthood with loyalty and monthly donations (*zaimu*).

Brian Wilson and Karel Dobbelaere (1994) suggest that it should be no surprise that a culturally conservative Japanese priesthood built on ideas of hierarchy, ritual, and traditional custom should conflict with a global lay movement built on ideas of egalitarianism, active faith, and rational adaptation to the modern world (243-4). As they report(232-45), on November 8, 1991, the Nichiren Shoshu demanded that the Soka Gakkai officially disband. When the Soka Gakkai refused to obey, the Nichiren Shoshu excommunicated the Soka Gakkai en masse. In response, Soka Gakkai sent a petition with 16.25 million names demanding the resignation of Nikken as High Priest.

On October 2, 1993 Soka Gakkai began to issue its own *Gohonzon*, using one originally transcribed by Nichikan, the 26th High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu. On April 5, 1998, Nikken secretly transferred the *Dai-Gohonzon* (the original *Gohonzon* written by Nichiren Daishonin) from the Main Temple *Shohondo* to the *Hoanden* Temple and on June 23 began the demolition of the *Shohondo*, the grand symbol of the former unity between the Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai.

¹⁸ The use of the word "excommunication" is symptomatic of the difficulties one encounters when dealing with the translation of terms pertaining to the religious sphere. The verb *hamon*, which the Japanese normally use to describe the separation between Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai, simply means "to expel, to throw out".

According to the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, the demolition was necessary “out of serious concerns for safety in the event of an earthquake” (Hurst, 2000: 69), as the temple “had begun to deteriorate from within, just as Nichiren’s Buddhism had been corrupted by Soka Gakkai and Daisaku Ikeda” (Ibid.). In spite of international protests by architects and historical preservationists, the demolition was completed in 1999, a cause for sorrow to many Soka Gakkai members, to which the destruction of the temple and the art works within it were an expression of the High Priest’s megalomania, since he intends to built his own version of the True Sanctuary on the site.¹⁹

The key questions concerning the split are very complex and involve spiritual leadership and responsibility, the correct role of the clergy and laity, the organisational problem of a small provincial priestly order suddenly growing into a mammoth national and international community of believers, and a power struggle between two strong leaders. The priesthood claimed that it was the sole custodian of religious authority and dogma, while the Soka Gakkai leadership argued that the sacred writings of Nichiren, and not the priesthood, represent the ultimate source of authority.

These two viewpoints resulted in doctrinal differences with significant implications. Nichiren Shoshu regarded the Three Great Treasures of Buddhism to be the True Buddha (Nichiren Daishonin), the Law (the *Dai-gohonzon*) and the Priest (specifically the high priest who carries Nichiren’s lineage). Soka Gakkai interprets the Three Great Treasures to be the True Buddha (Nichiren Daishonin), the Law (the *Dai-gohonzon*) and those who practice Nichiren’s Buddhism in the way taught by the first three Nichiren Shoshu High Priests (Hurst, 2000: 79). At issue was whether or not the ritual power of the priesthood conveys anything special that was not accessible to believers in their own personal practice. Nichiren Shoshu insists that priests are necessary to carry the pure lineage.

In Soka Gakkai's claim that any individual with deep faith in Nichiren's teachings can gain enlightenment without the assistance of a priest, an obvious parallel may be drawn with the Reformation and the struggle between Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Church over the supremacy of faith without intermediation.²⁰

Some Japanese religious scholars compare the High Priest's claims to be the sole repository of the doctrine with the Catholic views of the Pope as the legitimate disciple of Jesus Christ. Yukio Matsudo (2000), for example, writes about "the Protestant Character of Soka Gakkai" (59). Soka Gakkai claims for its followers direct access to the sacred texts (*sola scriptura*), and rejects sacerdotalism within a hierarchical structure that shows a discriminatory attitude on the part of the priests against the lay believers in favour of individual practice (*sola fides*). Matsudo, however, points out that Soka Gakkai itself is organised in strict hierarchical order, and its structure "gives to the outsiders more the impression of a gigantic enterprise with almost military flavour than that of a meditative tranquillity and spiritual modesty" (60).

Soka Gakkai, in a move that sounds similar to Luther's denunciation of the sale of indulgences, accused the priesthood of promising benefits for people if they offer *toba*, memorial tablets to commemorate the deceased (Métraux, 1992: 332). On the other hand, Nichiren Shoshu is highly critical of the Soka Gakkai's creation of the Komeito and its active involvement in Japanese politics, insisting that Komeito has

subverted the teachings of Nichiren and that it has been involved in a number of scandals (Métraux, 1992: 330). The excommunication order reads:

¹⁹ For the Soka Gakkai view, see www.save-shohondo.com ; for the Nichiren Shoshu view, see www.coyote.accessnv.com/tamonten/discus/index.htm .

Soka Gakkai has become an organisation which greatly vilifies Buddhist Law, which goes against the repeated mercy and guidance of the Chief Priest..., which is conspicuously changing the creed and the faith of this Sect, and which is destroying Buddhist teaching. This being the case, this Sect can no longer recognise Soka Gakkai, no matter how great its services of protection from the outside may have been in the past ...²¹

In the wake of the excommunication, the Soka Gakkai leadership retaliated by circulating a series of pamphlets about the corruption of the priesthood, accusing some of them of having a lucrative side business in the pornographic movie industry.²²

Also, in 1999 Soka Gakkai International re-issued a one-volume collection of 172 *gosho*, entitled *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. These translations were largely revised, with intent of rendering the work more readable. Soka Gakkai detractors, however, claim that the revision had been undertaken to purge the *gosho* of all references to the Nichiren Shoshu.²³

Métraux (1992) defines the struggle between Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu as a “religious civil war” based on financial reasons (334) and notes that:

Since Soka Gakkai members also belong to the Nichiren Shoshu and are commonly registered at Nichiren Shoshu temples, there is an on-going struggle for the hearts and souls of the laity that forms the basis of both organisations.

²⁰ On the comparison of the Nichiren Shoshu-Soka Gakkai affaire and the Protestant Reformation see Métraux 1994: 85-7; Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 232-33; Hurst, 2000: 82-8.

²¹ “Nichiren Shoshu Written Notification of Excommunication to Soka Gakkai, 1 December 1991” (as quoted in Métraux, 1992: 330).

²² Five pamphlets have been translated into Italian between 1997 and 1998: *Il Caso Nichiren Shoshu*, Edizioni Istituto Soka Gakkai.

²³ Discussion about the originality of the Nichiren’s texts, or about the alleged manipulation of the Japanese-English translation is not the subject of this dissertation. The debate can be followed at <www.geocities.com/chris_holte/Buddhism/IssuesInBuddhism/apocryphal.html>

Without the donations and support of the common member, both organisations would perish (334).

Soka Gakkai does not seem to have suffered from the separation from Nichiren Shoshu. Particularly in the West, SGI's members felt that the priesthood was never a vital part of their experience of Buddhism (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 244). The break with the spiritual authority of its parent organisation allowed Soka Gakkai to conceive of itself differently and to undergo a radical restructuring that continues into the present. In the year following the excommunication all SGI's local branches worldwide rapidly initiated the necessary legal procedures to change their denomination and to sever their ties to Nichiren Shoshu.

As of today, SGI still continues its official policy of fighting to destroy what it considers as the evil and corruption of the Nichiren Shoshu and what it perceives as Nikken's betrayal of Nichiren Daishonin. In December 2000 Ikeda, who in 1981 was awarded the title of "Poet Laureate" by the World Academy of Arts and Culture, composed a long poem to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the foundation of Soka Gakkai.²⁴ In the poem, entitled "The Victorious Future of Mentor and Disciple" Ikeda summons his members to fight with "mighty and passionate spirit", and expresses his vehement condemnation of Nichiren Shoshu's corruption:

I can see
Those who are like demons
Milling around what,
Unbeknownst to them,
Is only an execution block.

²⁴ < <http://www.ikedabooks.org/ikeda.html> >. According to the website, Ikeda's collection of poetry *Fighting for Peace* was a finalist in the 2005 Benjamin Franklin Awards' Poetry and Literary Criticism category.

They trample
 The noble spirit
 Of the Daishonin
 And have become
 Pitiful robbers of the Law.

Like a rapacious swarm of locusts,
 Nikken and his cronies
 Have exploited and persecuted
 And even plotted to destroy
 The Soka Gakkai
 An organisation of the highest good
 That has made unprecedented contributions
 To spreading the Law
 And worked so hard
 To support and protect priesthood.

...
 Backsliders in faith!
 Are you satisfied
 To lead a life
 Trapped in a maze
 Of hellish depth?

Slanderers of the Law!
 Having corrupted the Daishonin's teachings
 And veered from the eternal truth,
 Are you prepared
 To drift along forever in a state of life
 Of agonized defeat?

Traitors!
 Having turned your back
 On the Daishonin's golden words,
 Are you ready
 To be burned in the fires
 Of the hell of incessant suffering?
 To be imprisoned in a cavern
 In the hell of extreme cold?
 To be shut off in the darkness
 Of misery and strife,
 Forever deprived of the sun's light? ²⁵

²⁵ The complete text was published in English on the Soka Gakkai World Tribune, December 1, 2000 and can be viewed at < <http://crazywriters.tribe.net/thread/2cc64f5b-9a92-46fa-84f0-6be194d455bf> >. The integral Italian translation is included in the appendix and was published in *Il Nuovo Rinascimento*, n. 227, 2001: 4-6.

Since the split with Nichiren Shoshu SGI is firmly establishing itself as an independent religious body. It now performs its own funeral and wedding rites, and provides its members with its own *Gohonzon* (see also Chapter 4). The liturgy has also been purged of all reference to Nichiren Shoshu and modified to revolve around the centrality of Soka Gakkai and its President.

3.3.1. The *Gongyo* Prayers

Gongyo is the formalised repetition of the *Hoben* and *Juryo* chapters of the Lotus Sutra, the scripture at the basis of Nichiren Daishonin's doctrine. Although the form of *gongyo* varies according to each Nichirenite School, it is the central liturgy of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin. The *gongyo* book provides the text of the Sutra in Chinese ideograms, with a phonetic translation into the Roman alphabet, so that non-Japanese converts, who do not understand the meaning of the words, can learn how to chant.

Traditionally, Nichiren Shoshu's and Soka Gakkai's members are advised to perform *gongyo* in front of the *Gohonzon* every morning and evening, the form for both sessions being slightly different. An integral part of *gongyo* is *daimoku*, - the repetition of the mantra *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* which may also be practised outside the *gongyo* ceremony. The member start to chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* while lighting candles which represent Buddha's wisdom and the inherent wisdom to perceive innate Buddhahood, and incense, representing the essence of Buddha's life, or innate Buddhahood itself. Fresh water is offered every morning in front of the *Gohonzon*, and is taken out every evening, to symbolise freshness of faith. The *butsudan* (the wooden

cabinet enshrining the *Gohonzon*) is opened and the members kneel (or sit, in a more Western adaptation) in front of it holding prayer beads which are periodically rubbed together.

The ceremony of *gongyo* includes five Silent Prayers, to be performed after the repetition of a section of the Lotus Sutra. The text of the prayers is basically similar for all branches of Soka Gakkai International, and follows a blueprint provided by the parent organisation, although, as a note on the *gongyo* book recommends, the wording of the prayers is meant to express an inner sense of gratitude, and “it is not the specific wording, but rather what we have in our mind while performing the prayers that is most important”.²⁶ Thus, different countries can adapt their translation as deemed suitable for the specific culture.

The *gongyo* booklet was circulated under the title *The Liturgy of the Nichiren Shoshu* and was renamed as *The Liturgy of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin* after 1991. Originally it contained five silent prayers of appreciation to: the *Shoten Zenjin* (the guardian deities of Buddhism); the *Dai-gohonzon* (the original object of worship), Nichiren Daishonin and the High Priests in his lineage as well as prayers for the attainment of *Kosen rufu* and for the deceases.

The exact content of the silent prayers changed with the fluctuating relationship between the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and Soka Gakkai. Until 1978, when the relationship was still strong, the fourth silent prayer included the phrase “I pray for the Soka Gakkai to flourish and accomplish the merciful propagation of true Buddhism”. The fifth prayer for the deceased expressed appreciation to the first and the second president of Soka Gakkai, Tunesaburu Makiguchi and Josei Toda, for “their selfless

²⁶ *The Liturgy of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*. Soka Gakkai International-United Kingdom (1993: 48).

dedication to the propagation of the Law”.²⁷ After open conflict between the priest and the laity erupted, these sections of the prayers were omitted by the priesthood from *gongyo* books (Hurst, 2000: 68).

After 1991, when all 11 million Soka Gakkai members were excommunicated, two entirely different *gongyo* books were printed. The priesthood version is still called *The Liturgy of the Nichiren Shoshu*, and the prayers remain as they were in 1978, with no mention of the Soka Gakkai. The Soka Gakkai version, featuring the SGI’s symbol of worldwide propagation on the cover (a globe encased in a laurel wreath), reshaped the prayers around *Kosen rufu* and Soka Gakkai’s role in fulfilling it. The third prayer retains the original section which expresses praise and gratitude to Nichiren Shonin, Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin, but omits the phrase offering “deep gratitude to the successive High Priests”. More important changes involved the second prayer, which according to Nichiren Shoshu’s liturgy reads:

I express my sincere devotion to the *Dai-Gohonzon*, the soul of the *Juryo* Chapter of the Essential Teachings and the Supreme Law concealed within its depths, the fusion of the realm of the Original Infinite Law and the inherent wisdom within the Buddha of *Kuon Ganjo*, the manifestation of the Buddha of Intrinsically Perfect Wisdom, the eternal coexistence of the Ten Worlds, the entity of *Ichinen Sanzen*, the oneness of the Person and the Law, and the Supreme Object of Worship of the High Sanctuary. I also express my heartfelt gratitude for its beneficence and pray that its profound benevolent power may ever more prevail.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid.: 52.

²⁸ *The Liturgy of Nichiren Shoshu*. Nichiren Shoshu-United Kingdom (1988: 49).

In 1991 the prayer was changed and reduced on the basis that the principle of *zuhio bini* allows rituals and precepts to be modified to ease the comprehension and dissemination of Buddhism (NR. 126, 1992: 5). The new text reads

I offer my deepest praise and most sincere gratitude to the Dai-Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws, which was bestowed upon the entire world.

The process of simplification of the doctrines is certainly consistent with Soka Gakkai's efforts to universalise its movement, and to ease the access of Western converts to a mass of teachings which is alien to their culture. By removing the text, however, Soka Gakkai not only succeeded in erasing references to the teachings of its rival sect Nichiren Shoshu. It also removed from the prayer every mention to the cardinal elements of Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism and to the core of Nichiren doctrine.²⁹

Soka Gakkai seems to be more and more determined to establish its own form of Buddhism, in which Nichiren Daishonin's teachings play a secondary role. In fact, SGI has replaced the traditional reading of Nichiren Daishonin's writings with "lectures on the *goshō*", Daisaku Ikeda's interpretation of Nichiren's texts. These lectures are published monthly in SGI's magazines and constitute the core reading for members during SGI study meetings.

In the year 2000, Jane Hurst defined SGI's religion as "Ikedaism", commenting on the ever-increasing centrality of President Ikeda (Hurst, 2000: 81). The tendency towards the sacralisation of its President is evident today, with the inclusion of his name in the *gongyo* prayers. Following a further modification of the *gongyo* book in 2002, the third prayer now reads:

²⁹ For an overview of Nichiren Shoshu's doctrine, revolving around the principles of *Ichinen Sanzen* and *Kuon Ganjo*, see Murata, 1969: 45-67.

I pray that the great desire for kosen rufu be fulfilled, and that the SGI develop eternally in this endeavour. I offer my most sincere gratitude to the three founding presidents, Tsunesaburu Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda, for their eternal example of selfless dedication to the propagation of the Law.³⁰

The importance of the Lotus Sutra has also been downplayed in Soka Gakkai's practices, with the decision, in the same year, to abolish the *Juryo* chapter from the daily liturgy of *gongyo*.

3.4. In Search of Cultural Continuity: Translating Buddhism for the Western Market

Although the internationalisation of Soka Gakkai had begun in the early 1960s, when Ikeda and other Soka Gakkai members began travelling to the United States, Europe, South America, Africa, and India to organise chapters, SGI maintained a very low profile in the West during the so-called cult-scare days of the 1970s and 1980s when new religious movements such as The Church of Scientology and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness were receiving much press attention. Hammond and Machacek (1999) attribute this state of affair to certain specific choices made by the SGI leadership – choices that reflected the movement's decision to plan for the long term by courting legitimacy, even if such legitimacy came at the expense of immediate growth and the preservation of some of the movement's distinctively Japanese features (96-103).

Immediately after its split with Nichiren Shoshu, Soka Gakkai did not attract

³⁰ *Daily Practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*. Soka Gakkai-United Kingdom (2003: 29).

much scholarly interest. The only literature on the movement available in English, such as James White's very accurate *Sokagakkai and Mass Society* (1970) centred on the description of Soka Gakkai as a militant Buddhist sect in post-World-War II Japan. Another relevant study, Kiyooki Murata's *Japan's New Buddhism: an Objective Account of Soka Gakkai* (1969), does little more than provide an overview of the movement's history and theology. Nevertheless, Murata's study, with a preface by Daisaku Ikeda, could be considered Soka Gakkai's first serious effort to attract scholarly interest in the movement.

The first studies to examine SGI's adaptation in the West date from the early 1990s. Major works in this field include studies of the SGI in the United States by Snow (1987); Hurst (1992); and Hammond and Machacek (1999). The movement has also been analysed in Canada and Asia by Métraux (1996 and 2000); in Britain by Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) and Waterhouse (1997); in Italy by Macioti (1996/2002); and in Germany by Ionescu (2000). The opening pages of some of these volumes explicitly state that the SGI granted full cooperation and financial support. See, e.g., Wilson and Dobbelaere, *A Time to Chant: The Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain* (1994); Hammond and Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (1999); Wilson and Cresswell, *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response* (1999); Machacek and Wilson *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World* (2000).

Lorne L. Dawson (2001) has underlined SGI's efforts to enhance its cultural significance by providing financial support for studies undertaken by renowned scholars. He correctly points out that there is "nothing inherently suspicious in this state of affair – any more than a study of Catholic parishes done under the auspices of the Catholic Church" (340). And yet one has to consider (as Ian Reader does in his 1995 review of Wilson and Dobbelaere's *A Time to Chant*) that when studies are carried out

on the basis of comprehensive questionnaires administered to a sample of adherent whose names are drawn from a membership list provided by the movement, the responses show “an unsurprising lack of dissent” (220).

Notwithstanding debates over the accuracy of such surveys, the importance and popularity of Soka Gakkai cannot be denied. Indeed, the movement seems to satisfy all the features that Rodney Stark (1987) indicates as vital for the success of a New Religious Movement. In Stark’s view, success can be defined along a “continuous variable based on the degree to which a religious movement is able to dominate one or more societies” (12). Here Stark uses the verb “dominate” to indicate the influence that a NRM can have on behaviour, culture and public policy in a society, an influence that originates from “the conversion of the masses, of elites or both” (Ibid.). Stark has theorised that eight factors are crucial for the success or failure of a new religion:

- 1) cultural continuity with the conventional faiths of the society in which it appears or originates
- 2) Medium level of tension with the surrounding environment
- 3) Effective mobilization through strong governance and a high level of individual commitment
- 4) A normal age and sex structure
- 5) A favourable ecology, which exist when the religious economy is relatively unregulated; when conventional faiths are weakened by secularisation or social disruption; when it is possible to achieve at least local success within one generation
- 6) Network ties
- 7) The capacity to resist secularization
- 8) adequate socialization and the capacity to limit defections (13).

Two complementary elements are at the base of SGI’s rapid expansion. The first cause for success lies in its conscious and explicit efforts to adapt its organisational structure to Western societies. The complementary element is connected to the specific changes in the religious sensibilities of the Western world.

Colin Campbell (1999: 35-48) defines these changes as a shift from a Western religious paradigm to an Eastern one, i.e. a move away from the transcendentalism of Western religions and a move towards an Eastern, immanent conception of the divine. In this movement, the religious person ceases to be adequately characterised as a believer in the truth, and become, instead, a seeker after enlightenment:

The Eastern concept of spiritual perfection or self-deification replaces the Western idea of salvation, the notion of a Church is replaced by band of seekers attached to a spiritual leader or guru, while the distinction between believer and unbeliever is replaced by the idea that all beings exist on a scale of spirituality, a scale which can extend beyond this life (42).

As previously noted in Chapter 1, when the study of New Religious Movements began in the early 1980s, sociological discussion on the subject was centred on the issue of secularisation. The theory of secularisation assumed that, in various degrees, modernisation and secularisation were parallel phenomena. As a result, discussion of the importance and meaning of NRMs largely meant questioning whether they were in alignment with the social trends of modernity, or opposed to them.

Campbell (1999) accepts the truth of the proposition that the rise of science served to undermine peoples' faith in traditional religion. But he maintains that this assumption, far from indicating a demise in spirituality and a move toward secularisation, can be viewed as an indication of the search for a different paradigm. Thus, in Campbell's opinion, the success of many NRMs deriving from Oriental traditions, testifies that:

the Eastern paradigm is more compatible with modern thought than the traditional Western one and simply not vulnerable to an attack by science in the way that is the case with historically based religions (45).

In Campbell' view, the Eastern religious paradigm goes beyond the Western idea of the world as "divided into matter and spirit, and governed by an all-powerful, personal, creator God" (47) and rejects the vision of a God who has set human beings above the rest of creation. Eastern beliefs encourage a vision of humankind as merely part of a great interconnected web of sentient life, forming an "overarching paradigmatic metaphor, one which represents all the earth living creatures as interdependent, part of one natural-spiritual system" (Ibid.).

Campbell further believes that in the move from the transcendentalism of Western religions to an Eastern, immanent conception of the divine, the religious person ceases to be adequately characterised as a believer in the truth, and becomes, instead, a seeker after enlightenment:

The Eastern concept of spiritual perfection or self-deification replaces the Western idea of salvation, the notion of a Church is replaced by band of seekers attached to a spiritual leader or guru, while the distinction between believer and unbeliever is replaced by the idea that all beings exist on a scale of spirituality, a scale which can extend beyond this life (42).

It is perhaps too radical to endorse the idea that the success of an Oriental religious movement postulates a shift in paradigms, as studies on European religiosity demonstrate that the moral concepts and religious tradition of Christianity "continues to be widespread among large numbers of Europeans, even among a proportion for whom the orthodox institution of the Church has no place" (Davie, 2000: 7). However, the fact that a NRM survives in time and manages to prosper by adapting to a new culture can indeed be seen as an indication of its being in line with the changing ethos of its host culture. In the case of SGI, its specific Oriental features, such as the practice of chanting

a phrase of veneration for an ancient and decidedly non-Western religious text, the Lotus Sutra, seems attuned to a new religious consciousness, characterised by a syncretistic approach and a strong preference for a holistic worldview (Dawson, 2001: 356).

Another factor of cultural continuity between SGI and Western societies is explored in Hurst's study on SGI-USA (1992: 277-94), where she suggests that today the mainstream values of American society "are characterised by two related and sometimes contradictory views of the world, the Protestant ethic and the consumer ethos" (284). Thus, SGI's doctrine, with its emphasis on practical benefits and the idea of karma, provides a substitute for the declining Protestant ethic, fostering the drive to work hard, while offering new ways to overcome the no longer necessary legacy of anxiety of the Protestantism.

Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994: 216-31) and Wilson (2000: 349-74) built on Hurst's comments and, in their elaboration of Weber's Protestant ethic thesis, they underline the "clear congruity between the religious ethic and economic circumstances" (Wilson, 2000: 351) and maintain that SGI today fits with the shift of Western culture from a society attuned to the needs of production to one focussed on consumption (Ibid.).

In his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904/1974) Weber had argued that the Calvinist version of Protestantism induced in its believers a condition of doubt and anxiety over their chances of salvation, which impelled them in the direction of relentless and methodical work in the world in order to reduce that anxiety. Calvinism generally abjured the worship of the flesh, and treated the world as neutral, as a place in which to work for the greater glory of God but which was itself not necessarily sacred. This allowed innovations in society and the economy, encouraged the scientific investigation of reality, and at the same time began that process of

rationalisation which was later to lead to disenchantment with the world and its secularisation. Besides, to Weber, the fundamental element of all modern culture – “rational conduct on the basis of the idea of the calling” – was born “from the spirit of Christian asceticism” (1974: 180). The ascetic ethic of Protestantism was, undoubtedly, largely responsible for the patterns of self discipline, social order and civic commitment that enabled Western societies to advance economically and educationally. Yet, the austere ethic postulated that personal gratification was to be postponed to an afterlife. Echoing this, Bryan Wilson (2000) comments that “the Christian religion never assumed that human happiness in this life was in any sense a laudable or worthwhile” (350) and maintains that it was essentially the moral ethos of Soka Gakkai – in direct opposition to the indigenous “ethic of self-denial and constraint” that induced Britons to adopt this new faith:

Whilst not endorsing all the tenets of philosophical hedonism as such, the teachings of Soka Gakkai are certainly compatible with the ethic required by modern consumer society. Whilst individuals are responsible for their own behaviour, each member is left free to determine exactly what, in terms of day-to-day comportment, the cultivation of that responsibility should actually entail. His moral probity is not evidenced by self abnegation, by adherence to a code that disdains personal pleasure or the pursuit of happiness. Rather, he is enjoined not to forgo the good things of life, which are part of inherited entitlement. He is encouraged to take a positive attitude to secular culture and to human endeavour in all departments of life; to use his talents, to broaden his vision; and to avoid moral value judgments (354).

3.4.1. A Time to Chant: the Domestication of Soka Gakkai's Practices

By the late 1960s, SGI had developed a highly successful organisational form in Japan, and with the direct replication of that form in the United States and elsewhere (cfr. Clarke, 1999: 197-210) it achieved a sound foothold both in the immigrant Japanese population of these countries and amongst many non-Japanese followers.

By the mid 1970s SGI began a series of changes designed to better accommodate the movement to its new Western environment. Some of these changes dealt with the group's style of presentation. English was used in meetings and publications, shoes were left on in SGI centres and chairs were used instead of sitting on the floor, the traditional segregation of the sexes during meetings was abandoned, and leadership positions were opened up to women (Machacek, 2000: 287). In general, there was a move away from the patriarchal hierarchy of SGI in Japan to a more decentralised and quasi-congregational model of organisation. In America, even the organisation's name (Nichiren Shoshu Academy – at that time) was modelled to provide “an easy to pronounce acronym, NSA, which sounds very American (Hurst, 1980, as quoted in Machacek, 2000: 287). Also, the organisation's leader, Masayasu Sadanaga, changed his own name to George Williams in 1972, the name being chosen because of the frequency with which these names appeared in the Los Angeles telephone directory (Machacek, 2000: 287).

In most Western countries, the movement has progressively dismantled its strong bureaucratic apparatus, typical of the Japanese structure, with a corresponding divestment of power (Hurst, 1992: 228-29). In the movement's rhetoric, and in the perception of its members, SGI seems thus to be placing a strong emphasis on the immediate needs and personal development of its individual members over the importance of the organisation as such.

The other most important and dramatic organisational change came with the abandonment of the movement's aggressive recruitment style, known as *shakubuku*, which was replaced by a more soft-sell approach called *shoju*. As already mentioned, according to SGI, *shoju* means “to introduce the True Buddhism [to another person] without denying the sect to which the other man belongs”(White, 1970: 82). James White underlines how in its early years SGI had continued the fervent “evangelicalism” that helped to build its success in the disrupted cultural environment of post World War Two Japan. Members were under constant pressure to recruit new converts, level of activity in the group was intensive, and almost every meeting was dedicated to the task of winning new converts to the cause of spreading Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and the doctrine of *Kosen rufu* (82).

As the controversy surrounding other NRMs and their recruitment practices heated up, SGI reoriented the style and frequency of its meetings, transforming them into sessions designed to foster the faith and practice of existing members, and only secondarily the education of potential new members. Public recruitment drives were abandoned in favour of introducing friends and acquaintances to a new option in life, and largely by way of setting an appealing example. Hurst (1992: 174-96) documents these changes in the United States through observations of the changing character of SGI meetings at different phases of the movement's development. In her analysis, she observes that “carefully orchestrated instruction sessions” (195) shifted in time into more informal meetings for chanting and discussion.

Along the same lines, Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) observe that in Britain:

The tone of the Soka Gakkai meetings is altogether more conversational than exhortatory ... The occasion may be seen more as a sharing of experience and of opinion than as attempts to define positions or reach decisions. Divergences of

view are left unresolved, perhaps even unexplored... there is no attempt to produce artificial unanimity (17).

Hurst (1992: 196) notes that the turn away from *shakubuku* slowed the growth of the movement, and probably resulted in a significant net loss of membership. Hammond and Machacek (1999: 101-103), however, maintain that the loss of membership involved the people least likely to become long terms members: they were “recent members wrapped up in the enthusiasm of the campaigns of *shakubuku*, rather than the arduous practice of daily chanting that leads gradually to human revolution” (103) .

As Hammond and Machacek (1999) stress in their analysis of SGI-USA, the change in recruitment tactics had several further advantageous consequences. The soft approach of *soju* in fact strengthened SGI’s ability to retain converts, and allowed the movement to target its effort on a specific segment of society (104).

By the 1970s the Japanese immigrant community in America was drawn disproportionately from the professional ranks, especially the so-called new class of information workers. Consequently, as SGI made inroads into this community it began to recruit even more non-Japanese members, and non-Japanese members drawn from relatively high status backgrounds (Ibid.: 110). Forty percent of the American membership is in professional, managerial, or administrative occupations, versus only 29 percent of the general population (51). Recruiting and retaining such members undoubtedly contributed to the positive public image of SGI. Its status profile shifted upward from the more heterogeneous pool of converts (students, housewives) recruited through public forays in the 1960s (50-51).

In Britain, where the role of professional Japanese immigrants affiliated with SGI played a much lesser role, Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994: 119-121) found a very large number of members drawn from the “caring professions” (social work, medical fields, therapists, teachers) and the performing and the graphic arts. The single largest

segment of the British membership (27.3 percent) is also drawn from what Wilson and Dobbelaere classify as administrative and office staff positions (managers, civil servants, programmers, sales people, secretaries). The profile is similar to the American case, and the results are similar for the image of the movement. In line with the occupational profile, in both the U.S. and Britain the level of educational attainment of the membership was significantly higher than the national averages. In Britain, 24 percent of the large sample of members surveyed had attended university, when in 1990 only 8 per cent of the population had a university degree (Ibid.: 121-24). Hammond and Machacek's survey (1999) points out that "SGI-USA members are considerably more likely than ordinary Americans (66 percent vs. 33 percent) to have completed at least some college, more likely to hold a baccalaureate degree (40 percent vs. 26 percent), and they are about twice as likely to have an advanced degree (17 percent vs. 9 percent)" (52). In these ways, then, the policy of *shoju* helped probably strengthened the membership prospects of SGI, and its ability to retain members, by reducing the perceived costs of joining an unconventional religion (Ibid.: 102).

The occupational and educational status of existing members can act as an effective counter to the social stigma associated with joining an unconventional religion. In her 1996 study, Maria Immacolata Macioti (2002a) underlines that in the Italian academic world bias against NRMs is still very strong. These "sects", as they are pejoratively referred to, are often interpreted as movements that demonstrate "contempt for Western culture", and draw their membership from the lowest cultural levels of the population. In particular, Macioti quotes sociologist Cecilia Gatto Trocchi (1994) who maintains that in the new religions:

Western culture is only superficial understood, and the manner – partial and imprecise – in which it is comprehended often distorts it; the doctrinal and theological bases of Christianity are ignored, along with its history and its

traditions, while only a few ethical aspects are known, and of these, the one pertaining almost exclusively to sexual mores.³¹

In response, Macioti (2002a) points out that Soka Gakkai membership in Italy occupies a cultural level which is “higher than that for the average citizen” (121). According to her study, in fact, “13 percent of SGI’s members hold university degrees, and another 12.2 percent holds “diplomas from secondary institutions whose focus is either in Latin and Greek or mathematic and science” (Ibid.). These surveys underline the strong affinity that seems to exist between a religious movement which emphasises “mental work” (attitudes and individual focus) and the well educated who have to work very hard to attain their educational credentials. This phenomenon may well explain why SGI’s Buddhism is attractive to this particular social stratum and also helps explaining why the Japanese origin of Soka Gakkai does not seem to matter very much to non-Japanese converts.

The strategic accommodation of SGI also provided beneficial consequences in terms of the resultant organisation of the movement in the West. To recruit and to sustain members, a religious movement must establish some internal network of relations that maintains the exchange of affection, self esteem and personal support that are perceived to be a primary benefit of participation (Stark, 1987: 23). But a pattern of contact and communication amongst members that becomes too ingrained and personal can have undesirable consequences for the growth of the movement, as it can impede the efficient exercise of authority and the establishment of an appropriate division of tasks among members. This is not the case of SGI, as the movement managed to create a reticulate structure that works along “the interplay of vertical and horizontal lines of activities”(White, 1970: 90).

³¹ Quoted in Macioti, 2002a: 121.

As White points out, Soka Gakkai has always been a strict hierarchical organisation, with a clear chain of command. Members belong to a stratified system of levels of activity and the leaders of all but the lowest levels are appointed from above. A worldwide bureaucracy has been established, focussed on the headquarters in Japan, and on the powerful charismatic authority of Daisaku Ikeda (90). With the shift in orientation effected in the mid-1970s, some clear changes were introduced, and SGI in the West has certainly deviated from the rigidity of the original Japanese model, to the point that Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) underline “the strong democratic and egalitarian emphasis of SGI-UK” (166). Hurst (1992) suggests that SGI is still essentially a quite hierarchical and bureaucratic organisation, but its organisational structure “is successful “because in the perception of [its] members it is decentralised, segmented, and reticulate” (204).

Within SGI, each member's primary experience is at the lower levels of the organisation, where groups are kept small (varying from 5 to no more than 20 people) (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 166; Macioti, 1996: 37). These regular local meetings, which constitute the backbone of group participation, happen in people's home and the interaction is very personal and supportive. Even when members meet at the higher levels, as they do as well, “a pattern of relaxed and informal sociation prevails” (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 14). Leaders may be appointed, but this is done with consultation. Moreover, the individuals selected normally are known for they long and faithful practice and service, so the respect accorded them is usually quite genuine.

Most importantly, as Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994: 224-25) stress, leadership in SGI is modelled on the principle of “guidance”. This pervasive style of leadership is based on the traditional conception of the relationship of the master and disciple. People are not usually told what to do, they are offered encouragement and advice. The guidance may be extensive and frequent in some cases, but it is rarely doctrinaire or

sanctimonious. While SGI is hierarchical, then, it is not necessarily authoritarian. The emphasis on “guidance”, Wilson and Dobbelaere note “ensures that there is in place a systematic diffusion of certain values throughout the entire organisation” (225). Authority is reinforced in a subtle and continuous way, a way that is more in keeping with the democratic sensibilities of the movement's Western members.

Karel Dobbelaere (2000) refers to SGI's structure as a “pillar organisation”, a definition which refers to organisational complexes aiming at self sufficiency (233). As an example of pillarisation Dobbelaere cites the example of organised Catholicism that, through a network of schools, hospitals, youth movements, books and magazines, political parties and cultural associations, provides “almost all possible services from the cradle to the grave” (233). “In contrast to social classes, which integrate people on a horizontal basis”, Dobbelaere writes, “pillars do it on a vertical bases. Consequently, pillarization may be typified as an example of segmented differentiation, and by promoting segmented integration they may produce exclusiveness and an in-group mentality” (234).

Stark (1897) has argued that “successful movements consist of dense, but open social networks” (23). In his view, a loose structure incorporating a number of differently associated types of groups, ranging from study classes to business associations, works to ameliorate the accommodative dynamics of all religious movements. This is certainly the case of Soka Gakkai, whose internal structure is based on a network of peer-groups which help establishing strong bonds among its members. SGI organises its members into men's and women's divisions, as well as young men and young women's division, and each has its tasks and responsibilities. Further, SGI has developed a series of vocational associations, designed to foster the integration of the member's Buddhist beliefs into their practice of medicine, law, business, education, law, the arts and entertainment. Moreover, volunteerism is a fundamental part of member's

everyday practices, in the planning and running the many group activities. SGI offers a great number of opportunities for members to become acquainted with other converts across a wide geographic area. Consequently, Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) underline that:

By subsuming professional and cultural interests under the rubric of commitment to Buddhism, and enlisting the goodwill, skill, time and energy of adherents, Soka Gakkai maintains a high level of personal identification from its members, whose extra-religious interests and dispositions are assimilated to the movement's goals, and infused with its values (15).

Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) underline that members of religions in which the individual is encouraged to “work out your own salvation” are inclined to perceive their beliefs and practices as disjointed from formal organized structures, to the point that the organisation “may in such a context come to be perceived as otiose” (228). Indeed, since a relevant part of SGI’s core practice (the chanting of *daimoku* and *gongyo*) takes place at home, the movement has to constantly face the problem of mobilising its members for collective action. As Snow (1987) points out:

Movements that promise individuals the realisation of personal benefits or gain in their everyday lives if only they engage in some seemingly magical ritual such as chanting Nam-Myoho-rence-kyo ... run the risk of creating a pool of “free riders” within their ranks. After all, why help the movement attain some larger goal, such as world peace, when that goal constitutes... a “public good”... and when recitation of some mantra within the confines of one's home is sufficient to yield a continuous stream of physical, material, and spiritual benefit? Movements such as NSA are thus confronted with the task of convincing members both of the need for collective action and the utility of their participation in that action (162).

Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) maintain that this does not seem to be the case for SGI, as this movement “appear to have suffered few 'free riders', although in the nature of individual private belief and practice such people may be difficult to discover” (228). In fact, they later conclude that “a number of members had undergone a conversion from attitudes of hostility towards organisation to acceptance of, enthusiasm for, and commitment to SGI, and had acquired a keen appreciation of what they saw as the indispensability of structure and collective order in religion” (229). In the end, then, as Hurst (1992) asserts, SGI “has been able to do a delicate balancing act with its organisational structure”(209).

Through its reticulate structure SGI has been able to meet a variety of psychological and sociological needs of its members, thus facilitating the spread of the movement across class divisions and cultural boundaries. As Dawson (2001: 352) points out, the risk of failure for many contemporary NRMs, such as the case of Krishna Consciousness and the Unification Church, is that they have shown a tendency to recruit from too narrow a range of the populace, with regards to both census (often from the lower classes) and age (often from very young people). In the West, SGI has been largely a middle class group, and thus less in need of breaking out of a specific class limitation. Moreover, SGI has tended to appeal to a somewhat older and diverse segment of the population, and its decentralized practice is quite compatible with the responsibilities of family life, reducing the defections that tend to occur in more communal and demanding groups as their membership ages.

In the end, it is possible to suggest that the organisation of SGI today meets most of the relevant criteria of success delineated by Stark (1987: 13) in his formulation of the factors affecting the success of NRMs. SGI has been able to provide elements of cultural continuity and maintain a low tension with its surrounding environment. It has achieved “effective mobilisation” through a balance between strong governance and a

high level of individual commitment, and it has been able to attract and maintain a fairly “normal age and sex structure”. It has built a strong network of relations within its members without becoming isolated from society.

In 1976 Bryan Wilson, one of the chief exponents of the secularisation theory, discussed the insurgence of New Religious Movements and defined them as “no more than transient and volatile gestures of defiance” (101). Today, the vitality and resilience of some forms of NRMs suggest that they are to be seen instead as “symptomatic of the continued and healthy evolution of the forms of religious life” (Dawson, 1998: 138). Wilson himself seems to acknowledge that modern Soka Gakkai has outgrown the traditional secularisation theory. In their concluding remarks on their study on Soka Gakkai, in fact, Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) maintain that:

Ideologically and organisationally, then, the Soka Gakkai has found ready resonance with the changing course of wider currents of thought in the contemporary British society. ...In presenting an ancient faith in modern form it offers legitimization for many of the dispositions of today's young people. Innovation is baked by tradition. When thirteenth-century scriptures are given twentieth-century relevance, the mystery of the sacred invocation readily accommodates the pragmatism of everyday life. Contemporary cultural themes are allied to antique parables, and the burning issues of our times are addressed both in age-old rituals and by practical modern methods. Well may dedicated members affirm that SGI is a faith whose time has come – a time to chant (231).

THE INFLUENCE OF ITALIAN RELIGIOUS MEMORY ON THE ACCOMMODATION OF A RELIGIOUS ‘OTHERNESS’

According to a Catholic survey (CEI, 1994) – 90 per cent of Italians define themselves as Catholics.¹ However, the notion that Italy is therefore a monolithic Catholic country is less solid than it may seem when analyzed through the lens of Religious Market theory which was previously discussed in Chapter 1. When such an analysis is undertaken, it is possible to understand that the Italian sense of belonging to the Catholic Church “does not necessarily imply an adherence of conviction, accompanied by an appropriate system of beliefs and practices” (Marchisio and Pisati, 1999: 240). Rather, it can be often seen as “merely a ‘cultural’ belonging, born of inertia, the fruit of a religious economy long monopolised by the Catholic Church” (Ibid.). Moreover, by relying upon the metaphor of Italy as a “marketplace” where religious organisations compete in offering different religious goods to the a public of religious consumers, it is possible to highlight how the monopoly once exercised by the Catholic Church has, over time, been eroded. The reduction of its dominance over the religious market has, in turn, opened up possibilities for alternative forms of religious practice to flourish in the interstices. Catholicism, however, remains deeply rooted in the Italian soil as a form of “religious memory”, and influences the accommodation and

¹ The data refer to a study that the Catholic University of Milan conducted in 1994 for the CEI (Conferenza Episcopale Italiana) and is discussed in Cesareo, et al. (1995) *La Religiosità in Italia*. Milan: Mondadori. The CEI survey remains the only available source on Italian religiosity. Another survey, conducted by the Doxa Society of Milan between the late 1997 and early 1998 remains unpublished although Pisati and Marchiso (1999) examine some of the results of the Doxa survey in their work.

the translation of foreign religious practices.

4.1. The Italian Religious Market

The sociological literature on the subject seems to support the idea that a high degree of uniformity exists when it comes to Italian religious identity: 98 per cent of Italians are reported to have received the sacrament of baptism and to have been enrolled in a parish register (Riccardi, 1994: 6). As recently as 1995, of every 100 newborns, ninety-two were baptised (Mocellin, 1998: 28). That said, it bears noting that according to a national survey on Mass attendance conducted between 1997 and 1998, the level of attendance at Sunday Mass by Italians has declined considerably over the past forty years: if in 1956 an average 96 per cent of adults went to the Mass, in 1998 weekly practitioners represented 41 per cent. In relative terms, the data report a decline of 40 per cent (Doxa, as reported in Marchisio and Pisati, 1999: 246-47). The same survey reports that only 53.9 per cent among those Italians who attend the Mass once a week affirm that “they believe in the Catholic Church and its teachings without reservation” (Ibid.). Thus, although the data show that the Catholic Church still attracts an important share of religious demand overall, it also suggests that Italian Catholicism is gradually losing its “holding power” (246).

Italian religiosity has traditionally been studied through three main interpretative models. The first, mainly developed by Sabino Acquaviva in his *L'Eclissi del Sacro* (1961), tries to come to terms with the disaffection shown toward religious practices. It holds that contemporary society is generally characterised by a radical restriction of the space for religious expression, a situation in which secularisation is expanding significantly into all dimensions of religious life. According to this model, not only are

religious institutions losing their status and influence in society, but signs of faith, values and religious doctrines have also diminished in the consciousness of those individuals who formerly cared about such things.

The reflections of other scholars (in particular Garelli, 1991; 1996), who have developed a second hypothesis, are rather different in that they maintain that the Catholic Church shows a significant holding power and persistence in Italian society “to the point that it still remains the majority religion among the population” (Garelli, 1991: 37). According to this hypothesis, the religious values and the role of Catholicism continue to be impressive in Italy, and wherever religious sentiment still persists, it continues for the most part to be channelled into the official Catholic model of religiosity, in accordance with “the expressive modalities learned by the subjects during their basic religious socialisation” (Ibid.).

Standing halfway between the two previous interpretive models is a third approach (Burgalassi, 1970), which focuses on the permanence of the religious dimension although acknowledging the decline of the official model of church religion. This interpretation proposes an image of Italian religiosity which, although not adhering to its institutional dimension, is strictly linked to the Catholic Church “because of a generic appeal to a common Catholic culture” (Cesareo et al., 1995: 4).

When compared with the Religious Market theory, none of these three interpretive models seem completely satisfactorily at least for two reasons. First, because they are essentially Church-centric, that is, they predicate their notions of Italian religiosity on the exclusive idea of a fixed relationship between Italians and the Catholic Church. Put somewhat differently, each of these models presupposes and takes as their starting point a strict equivalence between “religion” and “Catholicism”. Secondly, and more simply, none of these models makes a clear distinction between “belonging” and “believing” (Davie, 1990).

The Catholic Church has always been one of the fundamental actors in Italian religious, political, social and cultural life (direct influence). Moreover, the offer on hand for Italians regarding religious belief — to believe or not to believe — has, for a very long time, been one exclusively of Catholic provenance (indirect influence). It is therefore acceptable to declare that Italians have across the centuries sedimented a culture that is Catholic both in its religious tenets and in its social practices. What is questionable (Marchisio, 1998: 33-52) is the theoretical framework which tends to unify the direct and indirect influences of the Catholic Church, thereby generating the automatic and, indeed, axiomatic proposition that Italians not only possess a strong and vigorous Catholic culture but are also themselves highly religious (Catholic) people. One consequence of such a Church-centric approach is that all sociological analysis based on the evidence of a decline of Catholic beliefs tends to conclude that Italian society is shifting towards “secularisation”. And yet an analysis based on the high levels of observance of Catholic practices (e.g., church marriages, baptism, etc.) supports the idea of a persisting Catholic dominance (Garelli, 1992: 65). Such mutually contradictory interpretations go to prove, as Burgalassi (1993) has underlined, that traditional Italian sociological inquiries with respect to religion have been “theoretically undeveloped” (330). Marchisio and Pisati (1999) seem to concur in that they maintain that the act of attributing a central role to the model of the institutional Catholic religion results in a lack of an explanatory model capable of capturing the many facets of Italian religious behaviour (238).

Indeed, it is only very recently that Italian sociologists (Cipriani, 1988; Pisati, 1998; Marchisio, 1998; Diotallevi, 2002; Barone, 2005) have started to apply the model of “religious economy” to analyse contemporary Italian religiosity, and have explored a religious scenario that shows Italians nominally belonging to the Catholic Church, but *de facto* deviating from it in terms of what they actually believe.

As previously noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, the paradigm of “religious economy” maintains that: “the religious subsystem of any society is entirely parallel to the subsystem in which commercial activities take place: both imply interaction between the demand and supply of valued goods and services” (Stark, 1998: 12). Religious pluralism derives directly from the universal human need for supernatural explanations. The quantity of demand is virtually invariable over time, but variable in the forms in which it is expressed, i.e., it varies according to the presence on the territory of religious organisations which seeks to serve the market by offering goods and services in the form of religious doctrines and practices. To Marchiso and Pisati (1999), the religious supply “includes both enterprises which produce collective goods and those which aim to provide private goods” (254). According to Iannaccone (1995), people make accurate “portfolio choices” in order to reduce risks, implicit in all investments in supernatural goods, and increase the hope for profit. Every choice in apparent contradiction or opposition, will appear rational, “since the risk is most effectively reduced by investing in assets that vary independently or even negatively” (288).

The paradigm of religious economy, as applied to the Italian religious market, examines data on both religious practices and religious beliefs. By engaging in a comparative analysis of data resulting from a number of different surveys on Italian religiosity, Marchisio and Pisati (1999: 236-55) are able to highlight that about ten out of every 100 Italians “believe without belonging”, that is they tend towards the divine without taking part in the activities of any particular religious organisation (although being nominally Catholic), while about 30 per cent of Italians says that they believe in Jesus Christ but identify only partially with the Catholic Church and its teachings. Marchisio and Pisati (1999) conclude from this that:

while it is certainly true that in Italy Catholicism shows a certain ‘holding power’, its ‘hold’, as a monopolistic religious enterprise with universalist aspirations, is rather imperfect, for 40 per cent of Italians, while showing an explicit demand for religion, have not found the Catholic Church to be a fully satisfying answer to their need for a relationship with the sacred (242).

A vast segment of the Italian population, then, satisfies its needs for religious goods outside of strict Catholic orthodoxy, and diversifies its “religious portfolios” through various channels of diffusion of new forms of spirituality (spiritual advisers, books, conferences, seminars). The result is a diffused tendency towards spirituality expressed in a highly syncretic form. Here, syncretism is intended as “not so much the appearance of new beliefs, but rather the widespread acceptance of ones which formerly had been confined to a minority” (Campbell, 1999:37). A survey conducted in Bologna on a group of Italian university students – all of whom described themselves as Catholics (Lucà Trombetta, 2004: 9-16) — provides an example of how religious syncretism is diffused throughout the Italian peninsula. Asked to identify “the core” of their religious beliefs, 43% centred their sacred dimension in “God”, while 18.1 % choose to answer “Nature, or Cosmic Energy”, and 8.1 % choose the option “Other/ Spirits and Paranormal Entities”. In addition, more than 80% of the group believed (or, at least, did not reject) the validity of one or more of a number of proposed options, such as: reincarnation (19.8%); possibility to contact the dead by spiritualist séance (11.6%); influence of the stars over human life (12.8%); existence of extra terrestrial intelligence (17.9%).

4.1.1 . Italian Religious Deregulation

The metaphor of religion as a “marketplace” allows us to understand the religious evolution which has been taking place in Italy at least since 1984. As Stark and Introvigne (2003: 144) have documented, the year 1984 marks the start of a partial “deregulation” of the Italian religious economy, thanks to the new agreement signed between the national government and the Catholic Church. Much like a free trade pact between a group of neighbouring countries, this agreement has stimulated an increase in foreign “religious goods” from abroad and a fierce competition for “market share” between the Catholic Church and other religious groups. An additional consequence is that the agreement may be indirectly responsible for the recent increase in religious activity now taking place in Italy.

When Italian unity was achieved in 1861, under the monarchy of the House of Savoy, Roman Catholicism remained the state religion. Although anti-clerical movements occasionally supported Protestant churches, the government remained strongly pro-Catholic and hostile to all religious minorities in accordance with the *Statuto Albertino* (1848) which recognised Roman Catholicism as the *Religione del Regno*. In 1929 Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) signed an agreement (*Concordato*) with the Holy See, granting a number of privileges to the Roman Catholic Church. From that moment onwards, Catholic parish priests received their salaries from the State, and Catholic religion was mandatory in schools. Religious minorities were subject to gradual discrimination and often persecuted (Stark and Introvigne, 2003: 115). From a linguistic point of view, the Concordat defines the Catholic Church as a “religion”, whereas other confessions are defined as “cults”.²

² cfr.: Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia < <http://www.giustizia.it> >.

With the fall of the Fascist regime and the end of World War II, a new democratic constitution was promulgated in 1947. It proclaimed all religions equal before the law (Section 8). It explicitly recognised the 1929 Concordat with the Catholic Church (Section 7), but also called for other “concordats”, known as *Intese*, to be agreed between the Italian State and other religious bodies (section 8.3). But while the idea existed in theory, no *Intese* were subsequently ever enacted until 1984. That is, until 1984 the Roman Catholic Church remained the only *religione* legally recognised in Italy, surrounded by a number of “cults”. The reason is political (Stark and Introvigne, 2003: 116). The *Democrazia Cristiana*, a party strongly tied to the Roman Catholic Church, won the 1948 general elections and remained in uninterrupted power (either alone or as the leading partner in any number of later coalitions) until 1994. Several restrictions applicable to religious minorities remained in force, although a number of these laws were gradually declared to be incompatible with the Constitution. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Christian Democratic authorities remained openly hostile towards religious minorities, particularly in Southern Italy, and the Italian “religious marketplace” was never truly deregulated, as the Constitution theoretically mandated (2).

The attitude towards religious minorities started to change in 1984, when the Italian government was led by socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi (1924-2000). Although the Christian Democrats, as usual, remained the largest party in the coalition, it was the first time that the Italian government had been led by a member from the Socialist party. Craxi negotiated a new agreement (*Nuovo Concordato*) with the Catholic Church, changing several key provisions of the 1929 Concordat. For example, Catholic parish priests no longer received a salary from the state. On the other hand, Italian taxpayers were required to devolve an amount corresponding to 0.8 % of their

total taxes to be channelled to “humanitarian or religious activities”³ This form of taxation is known in Italy as *Otto per Mille*, meaning “0.8 per cent”. Italian taxpayers cannot avoid the payment of this tax by declaring themselves agnostic. They are allowed, however, to devolve their *Otto per Mille* to the State, which is then empowered to use the money for humanitarian or cultural projects. Alternatively, they may ask the State to give the corresponding sum to a specified religious body. The necessity of offering more than one option to taxpayers established the need to enter into Concordats (*Intese*) with non-Catholic religious bodies, as allowed by the 1947 Constitution. In 1984, the first Italian *Intesa* was established with the Waldensian Church (the oldest Protestant body in Italy, which also represents the Methodist Church). Later, other religious bodies were legally recognised with similar *Intese*: Seventh-Day Adventists and Assemblies of God Pentecostals in 1988; the Union of Jewish Communities in 1989; and the Baptist and Lutherans in 1995. Through the *Intese*, these religious bodies were finally allowed to abandon the juridical status of “cults” and to be recognised as “religions”. As such, they can claim rights to the *Otto per Mille* tax, and can be allowed the financial benefits that the Italian State allows for the construction of churches and religious institutions, such as schools and kindergartens. Their members have now the same rights as the Catholics to receive religious assistance in hospitals and prisons, to have their own special funeral rites observed at public cemeteries and to have their marriage rites legally recognised. Also, their religion can be taught in public schools.

³ Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia < http://www.italgiure.giustizia.it/nir/1985/lexs_107870.html >

4.1.2. The Position of Buddhism within the Italian Religious Market: *Filosofia* or *Religione*?

Notwithstanding the impact of the *Intese*, in Italy the idea of religious pluralism is a mere “perception”, in a reality where Catholicism is still considered synonymous with Italian identity (Stark and Introvigne, 2003: 119). Besides, the discussion of religious pluralism in Italy mainly revolves around religions with roots on the Judeo-Christian tradition. The position of Buddhist groups is still marginal within Italian religious market, their practices being still considered as “filosofie” or “pratiche meditative” (Introvigne, 1989: 26).

In Italy, the study of Buddhism, inaugurated in 1957 with the publication of Giuseppe Tucci's (1894-1984) *Storia della Filosofia Indiana*, remained largely confined in the domain of academic studies until very recent years, although an interest in Oriental cultures had started to flourish at the end of the Nineteenth century, when two *Centro Studi Teosofici* were opened in Milan and Rome to circulate the works of the Theosophic Society. These centres issued the first Italian translation of Alfred Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), the central text of Theosophy. By the first half of the twentieth century the *Società Teosofica Italiana* had established its own publishing houses to oversee the circulation of periodicals aimed at the diffusion of Oriental teachings. From 1919 until 1939, the magazine *Gnosi* was edited in Turin, *Nirvana* was edited in Florence, *Reincarnazione* and *Karma* were edited in Palermo, *Atman* and *Il Teosofo* in Trieste (Tamburello, 1999: 6-8). These first approaches reflected an intellectual and theoretical interest on Oriental philosophies, but were not accompanied by the formation of a *sangha*, the community of converts actually practicing Buddhism.

In contrast to other European countries, where the first *sangha* had appeared in the 1920s, the first Buddhist groups in Italy started to develop in 1960 when Luigi

Martinelli, a monk in the Theravada tradition, established the *Associazione Buddhista Italiana*, which was linked to the Buddhist Society of London and the Buddhist Publication Society of Kandy (Sri Lanka). In 1967 Martinelli founded the magazine *Buddhismo Scientifico*, which was principally devoted to an analysis of the Theravada tradition. The dissemination of Buddhism was furthered by the development of the countercultural ground press which contributed to the diffusion of the American Beat generation movement. During the 1970s and 1980s the Vajrayana tradition was introduced in Italy by Tibetan refugees, and, at the same time, Nichiren's missionaries started their proselytising efforts (Falà, 1994: 128-195). In 1981 Vincenzo Piga (1921-1998) founded the magazine *Paramita. Quaderni di Buddhismo per la Pratica e per il Dialogo*. Piga is the founder of the Unione Buddhista Italiana (UBI), the first association in Italy which sought to unify all the different Buddhist traditions. It is thanks to Piga's efforts that the Italian State officially recognized UBI as a quasi-religious entity (Ente di Culto) in 1986. According to its by-laws, the UBI "does not want to represent any Buddhist groups in particular, and aims at protect and sustain the totality of Italian Buddhist movements by respecting all the different traditions" (Falà, 1994: 132). Soka Gakkai, which claims to propagate "True Buddhism", in opposition to all other traditions, is not part of the UBI.

Today UBI consists of 35 different Buddhist centres (and about 60,000 members), mainly from Theravada, Zen and Vajrayana tradition, and has its main centre in Pomaia (Pisa). UBI is characterised by a great spirit of dialogue with all other religions, and publishes the magazine *Dharma, Trimestrale di Buddhismo per la Pratica e per il Dialogo*. It has developed in time a network of cultural exchanges with the Catholic world and has collaborated with some of Italian's most important universities, such as Bologna, Rome, Neaples and Genoa.

One of the elements which characterise Buddhism, generally speaking, is the emphasis given to personal experience and individual practices. Although Buddhist converts can be organised into a *sangha*, their practice, mainly based on the repetition of a *mantra*, is largely private and can be performed at home. The Western idea of a “church”, intended as a bureaucratic and hierarchical institution, is alien to Buddhist tradition.⁴ Thus, underlining the Italian tendency to identify the idea of “religion” with the idea of “Church religion”, Massimo Introvigne (2006) suggests that in virtue of the peculiar feature of “believing without belonging” (i.e. without belonging to any structured Church), Italian converts are often not prepared to recognise their Oriental practices as a “religion” (17). Although Catholic practices (such as the frequency of Mass attendance) may show signs of decline, in fact, the tenets and the traditions of Catholicism still play an important part in Italian life. It is possible to suggest that, even among individuals who have opted for a radical change, by turning to one of the numerous religious organisation competing with the Catholic Church, Catholicism operates as a form of “religious memory” and influences the way in which Italians translate and domesticate notions pertaining to the sphere of the religious and of the sacred.

4.2. Religious Memory in the Shaping of Italian Identity

In Italy, the language of the Catholic Church created across the centuries a set of religious metaphors which contributed to build the sense of Italian identity by providing a common symbolic canon through which successive generations are linked.

⁴ Elaborating on Max Weber’s classification of religious organisations, Western sociology tends to identify a number of features which characterise the organisational model of a “church”: large membership; bureaucracy; professional clergy; and monopoly of the truth (Bird, 1999: 45).

As Enzo Pace (2003) points out:

the socio-linguistic evidence which defines the borders of meaning in the Italian life-world still acts as a mirror reflecting the collective consciousness: Catholicism is the matrix which generates such evidence.⁵

Religious language and practices can be seen as the most important common denominators for a nation which otherwise would appear extremely varied and fragmented in a myriad of regional cultures, local dialects and languages, municipal traditions and political sub-cultures.

As a relatively newly established State, Italy has had to deal with questions of national identity, a concept strongly advocated by governing bodies but poorly responded to by the population, throughout its existence. Nearly 150 years after the unification of Italy in 1861, the issue of national identity is still at stake, and a large mass of literature has been produced in an attempt to clarify the notion of Italian cultural identity (see, among the most recent works, Romano, 1994; Schiavone, 1998; Galli della Loggia, 1998). In the light of anthropological, historical and sociological analysis, Italy emerges as a nation that, beyond its façade of apparent homogeneity, is unable to express a solid common denominator which could identify its inhabitants as a “group”. The crucial matter, then, which I shall therefore try to unravel concerns the answer to the question: “What makes the Italians a people?”.

In a pioneering essay on the question of Italian identity entitled “L’Italiano: il carattere nazionale come storia e come invenzione” (1972), Giulio Bollati underlines how, having been relatively untouched by immigration until recent times - and therefore untouched by all of the related issues of racial, religious and cultural diversity - Italians

⁵ Enzo Pace. *The religious modernisation of Italian Catholicism*. Unpublished paper presented at the XXVII Conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion, 21-25 July 2003.

undoubtedly share the same culture and the same traditions. But this is where the difficulty begins, for how can we clearly identify the exact texture of this “culture”? Even Dante Alighieri in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* could only speak vaguely about sameness of “custom, clothing and speech”(I, xvi, 3). The literature on the subject tends to describe the Italians as characterised by an extreme sense of individualism. Ernesto Galli della Loggia (1988), for example, emphasises the lack of civic spirit of the Italians, Carlo Tullio-Altan (1989) underlines Italian tendency towards *trasformismo* and populism, Ruggiero Romano (1994) suggests that their strong attachment to the family (*familismo*) makes Italians strongly reluctant to identify themselves in the idea of “nation”.

Indeed, Italians seem to be characterised by the sometime pathological need for a strong and well-defined self-identity which generates a tendency to establish barriers, underpin differences, and express subtle and improbable *distinguo*. The pattern of mapping relationships between the ‘I’ and the “Other” is of course common to all human beings. As Stuart Hall underlines (1997: 258) identity is an ambivalent construct, more easily defined as one is not, rather than what one is. Italian people show a strong attitude to build a fragmented reality through a process of never-ending oppositions, and Italian sense of belonging is measured against the creation of an opponent. This conflict is visible not only at the macrocosmic level of the dialectic relationship of the Individual versus the State, the North versus the South, the Right versus the Left in politics, and private interest versus common interest. It is also present at the microcosmic level of parochialism, for which Italy is most typically and negatively seen by foreigners. As the Italian sociologist Loredana Sciolla (1997: 7-13) points out, here we enter the domain of stereotypes. It is far too easy, (and misleading) to use images of a stereotypical *italianità* to construct the representation of a country. Furthermore, stereotypical images do not remain confined within national boundaries,

but travel outside to build a magnified vision of entirely negative features, which eventually bounce back to generate a distorted image of self-representation. Thus, Italians often remain entrapped within their stereotypical role, while foreign observers are puzzled by the strong paradoxes pertaining to the Italian nature. Zygmunt Baranski (2001), for instance, comments that:

the reluctance of Italian citizens to think and feel in national terms disappears in special occasions, for example when celebrating the achievements of some great figures of the pre-unification past, or when shouting support for an athlete or a team donning the country's blue international shirt (p. 11).

Although offering a reductive vision of reality, stereotypes are very important from an anthropological point of view. They are considered as fundamental parts of the cognitive schema, a schema that works on a metonymic base, where the part functions to represent the whole. In our case, a cultural segment (the part) is considered as representative for the culture of a group (the whole). Thus, the study of stereotypes, images and literary *topoi* is a vital instrument for cultural translation (Piasere, 1998: 149).

Between stereotype and reality lies the assumption that "Italy is a Catholic country". Recent research on "Identità Italiana e Cattolicesimo" (Mozzarelli et al., 2003) underlines that "Italians continue to believe that the Catholic religion makes it possible to imagine as united a society which in fact has become increasingly different, in ethical and moral terms as well as religion" (14). Roberto Cipriani (1993: 200) remarks that Catholicism functions in Italy as a form of "sacred canopy", a diffuse set of beliefs that pervades many sectors of social life and maintains its influence over common values. This cluster of common values tends to unify behaviour and attitudes deriving from both the religious and lay perspectives. It is a sort of popular ethos, which

is the manifestation of the spiritual force of the Italian collectivity, and creates, protects and transmits the models of everyday life, of its ethic and aesthetic practices.

Enzo Pace (1993) points out that although a large segment of Italian population expresses a degree of dissatisfaction towards the dogmas of Catholicism, the same segment of people is ready to recognise that “the Roman Church has provided a set of images or *topoi* through which Italian sense of identity can be imagined and remembered” (218). It is therefore possible to claim that, even if the stereotypical assumption that Italy is a thoroughly religious country is highly questionable (Marchisio and Pisati, 1999: 242), many of the social practices that Italians perform in everyday life are a direct consequence of the Catholic culture. As Pace (2003) remarks, the Catholic “umbrella” is the only cohesive power capable of integrating Italian social and political diversities, and to give a sense of the macroscopic oxymoron that frames Italian present identity. Immediately after the Second World War, politics erected further boundaries among the various geographical and socio-cultural areas: some areas were predominantly Catholic, others predominantly socialist; yet other areas yearned for the “good old days” of Fascism, while others were under the violent control of the Mafia. “Believing”, Pace maintains, “meant adhering to different socio-cultural systems which, by social mimesis, ended up resembling each others. The Catholic language functioned as the only possible language to integrate into an eschatological view (religious and secular) both Christian or socialist *societates*”.

The phenomenon of social mimesis was already observed by Robert N. Bellah in his study on the “Five Religions of Modern Italy” (1974). Bellah discusses five forms of civic religion in Italy, namely “real” religion, “legal” religion, liberalism, activism and socialism. “Real” religion is described as the mass of Christian principles which acts as a prescriptive model for conduct and behaviour. Although the “real” religion originally had pre-Catholic, or even pre-Christian characteristics, it has undoubtedly

drawn values, orientations, models, and practices from the dominant Catholicism. Catholicism also acts as a “legal” religion, often in contrast with “real” religion, in the field of political and moral choices (the latter especially at the level of private life) (Cipriani, 1989: 32). The weight of Catholicism influences all other forms of socialisation, and this influence extends even to its declared opponents, be they Marxist or lay.

According to Prandi (1983: 58 ff), the Church’s major concerns have always been the value of the family and the subordination of women, the myth of the land, private property, the acceptance of one’s social station and the virtue of obedience. The priest’s voice thundered against atheists, sinners, and, in modern times, Communists, promising eternal damnation and castigation. The most extreme action in the anti-Communist drive was taken by the Church in 1949, when the Vatican issued a decree, the *Avviso Sacro*, excommunicating all Communists and forbidding all Catholics from reading any communist publication (Kertzer, 1980: 106).

4.2.1. Catholic Influences on the Language of Symbolic Rituals

As Kertzer (1980: 1-7) notes, only the sharing of the same social habits and public rituals protects the survival of a nation made of “Comrades and Christians”, a nation where the *Democrazia Cristiana*, a party connected to the Church, could head coalition governments in Italy from 1948 to 1992, in dialectic balance with the Italian Communist Party - which has been one of the strongest and most successful of all Communist parties in Western Europe - and where, despite vigorous opposition from the Church, the Italian parliament legalised divorce as early as 1970 and abortion in 1978.

In 1978, the political commentator Giorgio Bocca coined the designation of “catho-communism” (6) to indicate the mixture of Marxist politics and the absolutist ethic of Catholicism which characterised the attitude of many members of the Italian Communist party. Although criticism of the Roman Catholic Church often takes the form of radical anticlericalism, the Catholic cultural framework is an overwhelming presence in Italy, as can be demonstrated through an analysis of social rites of passage, such as birth and marriage. Kertzer (1980: 5) writes that in Italy the Communist party has long been seen as a rival Church, competing with the Catholic Church on social, ideological and ritual grounds. He also underlines how the choice for non-believers to marry and baptise their children in the Church has to be seen as a consequence for the lack of a valid alternative in symbolic references. As anthropology demonstrates, all cultures rely on a specific rituality to celebrate moment of passage, such as birth, adolescence, marriage, death, and so on. Those forms of family aggregation are representational practices that shape our identity. In Italy, the supply of symbols and rituals to celebrate those rites has always arisen out of a Catholic matrix. Church teachings have provided many of the basic conceptions in a cosmology of ideas about human agency, natural forces, fortune and misfortune.

This is true even in the case of the persistence of pagan symbolism that, as Ernesto De Martino demonstrates in his essay *Sud e Magia* (1959), has been translated into the language of the Church. Ancient vestiges are forgotten, and a new memory is created. In Italy, a strong cult of the Saints performing all sorts of miracles has been encouraged to obliterate every link to pre-Christian magical practices as well as pagan or non-conventional beliefs. This is an interesting case to underline the implications of translation in the formation of a cultural memory. Whenever a concept starts to appear dangerous, it is possible to defuse it by the manipulation of its words. We can rephrase it in a language that has previously been pre-digested, so that even the most explosive

of the metaphors can be reduced to what Paul Ricoeur (1978) defines as a “dead metaphor” or metaphors which, after a long usage, are “devoided of semantic impertinence” (291). And as Halbwachs (1992) affirms, language, with the whole system of social conventions attached to it, is the most elementary and most stable framework of collective memory (38). In this case, “language” has to be considered in its most wide definition of verbal and written signs, but also as a set of visual signs (art, images, icons, gestures) and sounds (music and litanies). It is then possible to suggest that the vocabulary and semantic tools for collective representation in Italy has been entirely “copyrighted” by the Roman Catholic Church, and Church discourse has influenced the shaping of the Italian attitude to life.

4.2.2. Catholic Propaganda and the Formation of Church Discourse

The term “propaganda” has distinctly Catholic origins, as it can be traced back to Pope Gregory XV’s Papal Bull *Inscrutabili Divinae* (1622) establishing the Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*. The congregation’s mission (from the Latin *mittere*, to send forth), was to reconquer, by preaching and catechising, the masses of Catholic believers lost after the Reformation. Today, the term remains in everyday language to identify

the product of intellectual work that is itself highly organised; it aims at persuading large masses of people about the virtues of some organisation, cause, or person. And its success or failure depends on how well it captures, expresses, and then rechannels specific existing sentiments (Jackcall, 1995: 2).

The mass networks necessary to propagate Catholic culture in modern times are numerous and widespread, and were well established soon after Italy's national unification. The most important network is the Catholic press. As Cipriani (1989) reports, a fifth of the whole Italian press is explicitly Catholic (2,000 titles out of 10,000) and controls a variety of publications throughout the country. The Catholic magazine *Famiglia Cristiana*, with a circulation of 1.3 million copies every week remains the most diffused publication in the Italian territory (43). Then there is the tight net of *parrocchie* (the ecclesiastical territorial institutions), which is supported on the territory by a large group of Catholic associational organisations. Together, they provide assistance and guidance to all segments of the society, such as children education, hospital assistance, care of elderly people. Moreover, the strong connections between religion and political life allow the Church to rely on public institutions (school, radio and television) to spread the tenets of Catholic culture. The relation between mass media and the Vatican is very strong. To cite but one example: every Sunday the Pope's speech is televised, and his appeals for human rights, for the values of freedom and democracy, for the sentiments of fraternity and solidarity find diffused resonance well beyond the context of the religious practices that occur in Catholic churches (Cipriani, 1984: 81). The media also accord much attention to even the most minor of Vatican initiatives: On 19th June 2007, for example, all national newspapers opened their first page by illustrating the "Codice della Strada Vaticano", an official document where the Vatican encourages car drivers to chant the Rosary while driving, and to start their journey with the sign of the cross (*La Repubblica*, 19 June 2007: 1).

The themes of Catholic propaganda revolve around a precise symbolic language that is still perceived in everyday life, and the manipulation of the social imagery has gradually bent the relationship between rules and norms: although certain behaviour is not prescriptive, it is heavily felt as "natural". In this, the Catholic influence over Italian

society can be described as “hegemonic”, following Gramsci’s (1971) definition of hegemony as a power “based on the internalisation of the norms and values implied by the prevailing discourse within the social order” (1126).

The dominant feature of the Church’s discourse is to create a “religious enchantment” (Cipriani, 1988: 18 ff.), to secure the stability of society through a systematic sanctification of social status and social classes and the role imposed by it. Down through the centuries, the Catholic Church language has slowly penetrated Italian tradition to create a solid social ethos, a “system of implicit schemata of actions, where a system of religious symbols is directed toward the legitimisation of an ideology” (Bourdieu, 1971: 310). The ideology of the Catholic Church finds its roots in the Counter-Reformation, when Modernity and the subsequent deviation from a pre-existent social order were considered as direct consequence of the Reformation, which was deemed the work of the devil. Since then, all the efforts of religious literature have been directed toward the creation of an ethic universe.

In his fundamental work on popular religion in Italy, Carlo Prandi (1983) analyses how the Church has manipulated religious memory, positioning it outside any possible historical context. Through the systematic use of an apocalyptic language, social imagery was directed toward the nostalgic appeal of a lost “golden age”, where people lived in natural communion with God. Here, the word “natural” refers to a specific Nature, which is pre-historic (*in illo tempore* : at “that” time) and therefore at the ground of collective history. The natural world was made in God’s image, and the role of all human beings was to live in harmony with nature. Society was seen as a divinely ordained moral organism in which each part had a special role to play in securing the well-being of the whole, and the Church could place itself in the position of supreme guardian of virtue and stability. Analysis of devotional literature indicates a number of ideological concerns which have remained largely unchanged to the present

day.⁶ The purpose of this literature was to propagate the message that there was no moral alternative to the Roman Catholic Christian way of life. As Cipriani (1983: 77) points out, devotional literature played an important role in the diffusion of Catholic discourse. Differently from the case of Protestant cultures, in fact, where the Church traditionally encourages its people to confront the sacred text directly, in Italy direct access to the Holy Scriptures was encouraged only after the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council (1962-1965). Thus, Italian religious culture has traditionally been rooted in secondary sources, such as the Catholic catechism and Catholic devotional books. In addition, sermons, where the priest in the pulpit was considered to be the repository of the “ultimate truth”, have had a huge effect on the behaviours and practices of Churchgoers.

One of the chief characteristics of Catholic propaganda is its ability to mutate, to adapt itself to different circumstances, and to adjust its voice to a variety of listeners. As Gramsci (1975) wrote:

Catholic religion is a multiplicity of teachings: there is a Catholicism for the peasants, a Catholicism for the middle class, a Catholicism for the women, a Catholicism for the intellectuals (1397).

Gramsci underlines how within the Church framework, all social classes were requested to accept their “natural” position, because this position was based on *la Provvidenza*, or God’s will. To fight against it, would be the cause of perpetual conflict and only “bring confusion and barbarity” (*Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII, 1883).

The condemnation of industry and urbanisation was a direct consequence of a Church that identified peasant society as its fundamental point of reference for the

⁶ On the subject, see for example *Memoria del Sacro e Tradizione orale. Atti del terzo colloquio Interdisciplinare del Centro Studi Antoniani*. (1984) Padova: Edizioni Messaggero.

identification of ethic-religious and political values. The myth of the land as the source and depository of all Christian and civic virtues (Nature-Man-God) led Catholic apologists to re-phrase the Enlightenment myth of the “noble savage” into the ideology of the “noble peasant”, last refuge of sound customs and the true faith. The attitude toward wealth and private property is twofold. On the one hand, the poor man was encouraged to see his humble circumstances as a way to practise the virtue of humility, and to pray for eternal joy in the afterlife. For the wealthy, salvation would be granted by practising the virtues of charity and alms giving. The constant reference to the virtue of humility as opposed to arrogance or pride has sedimented into a series of psychological consequences for social behaviour. Differently from Protestant cultures, where success and wealth are perceived as a sign of moral achievement, Italian society still sees success as mundane and opposed to religious seriousness. Thus, the entire semantic area that revolves around “money and wealth and happiness” is full of social taboos. Italian small talk is crowded with references to “poor health”, “meagre wages” life as “a cross one has to bear”, marriage as “sacrifice” (Cipriani, 2003: 313).

Inside Italian society, women are perhaps the ones who most heavily suffered the burden of Catholic ideology across the centuries, and are still struggling to overcome the cultural stereotypes that dictate that caring for a family is their natural condition, one so willed by divine fiat. Tradition is adamant in stating the complementary roles of men and women, with the man as the lord and master (*paterfamiliae*), and the woman in a subordinate position (Prandi, 1983: 91). In the role of mother and husband’s helpmate a woman was able to secure her salvation in the afterlife by practicing the virtues of modesty, submission and sacrifice. The only available role-model was Mary, the *summa* of all female virtues, who suffered silently and with dignity. In spite of the evident changes in society, many women still suffer a

secret sense of guilt when they choose to challenge the common idea that there are no Christian virtues outside the family.

4.2.3. Catholic Influences on the Language of Authority

Another influence of Catholic ideology can be found in the way Italians respond to issues of power and authority. According to Allum (2001: 111), the Church's insistence on the acceptance of one's station in life and on the supreme virtue of obedience to God's will was not only a call to support the social *status quo* and reject secular ideologies, but also constituted a command to obey the Church as an institution and to regard its leader, the Pope, as the only true interpreter of God's voice. Obedience and resignation are at the origins of Italian's attitude to *immobilismo*, the belief that nothing can really be successfully changed in life, as well expressed in the famous passage in Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *Il Gattopardo* (1958/2005), where the author remarks that “ Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga com'è tutto deve cambiare perchè nulla cambi” (41), i.e. it must be that everything changes in order for everything to remain the same. At the same time, the organisational model of the Church, characterised by a highly centralised bureaucratic structure, with the Pope at the top of the pyramid and his Vatican officials in a rigid chain of command, created what Cipriani (1989) defines as the “mainstream effect of the Catholic organisational structure” (31). In Cipriani's view, the Catholic Church acts as the blueprint on which Italians model every other form of socialisation, and is a force influencing and affecting even the “secular religions” of Italian Marxism and liberalism, to the point that :

the very dynamics of secularisation in Italy ... are to some extent fleshed out and moulded by some characteristics of more diffused religion such as dogmatism, ideologism, militantism, proselytism and so forth (31).

According to Ruggiero Romano (1994) the Catholic Church as an institution, with its hierarchy dominated by the charismatic figure of the Pope, prepared the ground for full domination by a political charismatic leader. Romano suggests that Italians suffer from “a sense of inferiority generated by being citizens of a nation which did not exist until 1860”. Italian historiography has thus generated a “memoria storica dicotomica”, which, from the Risorgimento onwards, has tried to trace the origins of Italy back to the virtues and glory of the ancient Rome, creating an attitude of pompous rhetoric that still prevails in Italian political oratory. With the collapse of the Roman empire – and the disappearance of its heroic leaders, the search for charismatic figures has been shifted to the ecclesiastical institution which, alone, had survived the fragmentation of the social structure and worked to maintain an administrative and cultural continuity.

Catholic culture, largely built around the figure of Jesus and related personality cults (the Virgin Mary, the saints) is suited to encourage a popular longing for extraordinary leaders. Thus, from the Risorgimento onwards, Italian political iconography represented a series of leaders in terms which borrowed heavily from Roman Catholicism and its “institutional” charisma, where the charismatic figure is venerated in virtue of the fascination and appeal of its role. An example of this are the figures of Giuseppe Garibaldi and Benito Mussolini, whose public images were built on the cult of their personality and on the emergence of a “civic religion”, which relied on Catholic notions of the sacred. Among the most popular representation of Garibaldi, for example, were those of the leader in the guise of a saviour and saint (Gundle and Riall, 1998: 156).

As the experience of modern popes clearly shows, the successful charismatic leader is one who uses and has mastered the modern art of mass communication. Garibaldi evoked a response from contemporary sensibilities by embodying the romantic hero of popular fiction. Mussolini embodied the new idea of the “strong man” widely disseminated in Italy after the First World War, and “good Fascists” were driven by the sense of a religious mission, as they considered themselves as “the apostles of a faith, the soldiers of an idea” (Simonini, 1978: 38). Today, it is not without significance that in 1994 Silvio Berlusconi presented himself in the guise of a saviour, seducing the electorate with the parable of the self-made man who puts himself at the service of the Nation. His media image was projected as following a religious iconography, and was duly accompanied by images of a stable family, loving children and a devoted wife.

4.3. FROM SANGHA TO CHURCH: THE DOMESTICATION OF SOKA GAKKAI

Through these observations it is possible to begin to examine the development of Soka Gakkai in Italy. As the chronological overview will highlight, the passage from a spontaneous and lay *sangha* to a religious movement is marked by a dramatic mutation in language and organisational structure. Today, the adaptation of Soka Gakkai in Italy presents some of the features typical of the Catholic Church, such as the strict hierarchic organisation revolving around the figure of the *Responsabili*, the insistence on the virtue of obedience and submission, and the reverence for the charismatic leader.

4.3.1. A Chronological Overview

Daisaku Ikeda, president of the Soka Gakkai (which at that time was still a branch of the Nichiren Shoshu) made his first visit to Europe on the 4th October 1961.⁷ At the time, Europe had a total of eight Nichiren Shoshu members, all of them of Japanese nationality. Ikeda spent part of his trip in Rome, where he visited a number of important historical sites dating from the time of Imperial Rome and was moved by what he saw to compose the following verses:

In piedi
tra le rovine di Roma
sento la certezza che il regno della mistica Legge non perirà mai.⁸

To later Soka Gakkai's adherents, Ikeda's verses presaged the movement's establishment and phenomenal growth in Italy (NR 297, 2004: 8). Ikeda would return to Rome soon thereafter to celebrate the founding there, through a group of Japanese practitioners, of the first "Settore Italia".

On 14 January 1970, Nichiren Daishonin's style of Buddhism officially established itself in Italy as a result of the foundation of the first Italian Chapter of the Italian Nichiren Shoshu (hereafter "INS"). The Chapter was composed of some 20 adherents who gravitated around the figures of Mitsuhiro Kaneda and his young wife Kimiko, both of whom had arrived in Rome with the specific intent of propagating Nichiren's Buddhism through missionary work. Together with the Kanedas, who

⁷ cfr. *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (hereafter NR) June, 1987: 2-13 and NR 87, 1989: 4-7. Each issue of *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* is referenced by month and year until December 1987, and by number and year starting from 1988.

⁸ At the foot of Rome's ruins / I feel certain that the kingdom of the mystical Law will not perish (NR 297, 2004: 8).

initially did not speak Italian, the first Italian member to transplant and, in fact, translate *sensu strictu* Nichiren's Buddhism in those early days was an Italian woman by the name of Amalia Miglionico, who had previously lived in Japan, where she had practised Buddhism for a lengthy period of time. Miglionico became the INS's first official translator from Japanese, and until the year of her death (2002), she was to supervise most of the translation published in *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* and *DuemilaUno* (now *Buddismo e Società*), the Association's two official magazines. It is thanks to the three-person nucleus of Mitsuhiro and Kimiko Kaneda and Amalia Miglionico that an interest in the "exotic" practices of the Nichiren Shoshu/Soka Gakkai first began to grow in Italy.

In November 1976, 60 adherents gathered in Poppiano (Florence) for the first INS general meeting (NR June, 1987: 11). In August 1979, the membership of the Italian INS rose to 457 (Ibid.), and that year's general meeting was held in Bardonecchia (Turin) principally in order to make preparations to celebrate *il Presidente* Ikeda's future visit to Italy, which was expected to occur two years later, in 1981. Ikeda's subsequent visit, in May 1981, was a key event in generating greater propagation efforts. In what the movement considers an historic speech⁹ Ikeda declared that Italy had "la missione di Kosen Rufu in Europa". In this vision, Italians were to become pioneers in the propagation of Nichiren's Buddhism: from Florence, the major cultural and artistic centre of the Italian Renaissance, a new renaissance (Nuovo Rinascimento) would emerge to spread its lights all over Europe.

In 1982, the INS established *Il Nuovo Rinascimento*, its first official publication, which was intended for internal circulation among members. The magazine's contents included material for group study meeting (usually held monthly to explain Nichiren Daishonin's *gosho*) as well as translations of President Ikeda's

⁹ Reprinted in NR 297, 2004: 6-8.

speeches, which were to be discussed at *zadankai* (discussion meetings, usually held every other week). In addition, each issue opened with an editorial by Mitsuhiro Kaneda, who would remain in charge as *Direttore Generale* of the INS until 2001. As a result, subscription to the magazine would become virtually compulsory for all INS adherents.

In 1986, the INS established *DuemilaUno*, a by-monthly magazine conceived for a more general circulation outside of the organisation's own membership, the aim of which was to cultivate "a common ground for dialogue with the outside world of culture" (Macioti, 2002a: 76). In an interview published in *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (NR 362, 2006: 8), the then-editor explained that the title *DuemilaUno* refers to a poem that Daisaku Ikeda had composed specifically for the Italian members of the INS, which counselled: "Giovani / scalate la montagna del Ventunesimo secolo" (Youths/climb the 21th Century's mountain"). The poem was written in 1981 and explicitly refers to the missionary spirit which Ikeda sought to inculcate in Italian members. After stating that "Italy has won/and has become/ Europe's brightest hope, a marvellous example for the whole world" the poem declares that now, at the dawn of the 21th Century, "it is time once more for the kings to rise again/on the world's stage/ like pioneers".

L'Italia ha vinto
 e' diventata la luminosa speranza dell'Europa
 un magnifico esempio nel mondo
 (...)
 E' il momento che i re nuovamente si alzino
 Sul palcoscenico del mondo
 Come pionieri¹⁰

¹⁰ Reprinted in NR 297, 2004: 6.

The magazine editor comments:

Nella sua ingenua e geniale semplicità, DuemilaUno era l'esatta espressione della tensione vitale, della visione ottimistica, della proiezione verso il futuro di quel gruppo di giovani praticanti che stavano mettendo le basi della Soka Gakkai in Italia. Poi non si può dimenticare che Daisaku Ikeda - nostro presidente e Maestro – con la data 3 maggio 2001 aveva indicato ai membri della Soka Gakkai una prospettiva precisa: il compimento del primo passo verso la costruzione di una società pacifica. Primo passo che significava tante cose concrete: impegno a trasformare se stessi vincendo il proprio egoismo, impegno a farsi carico della sofferenza degli altri, impegno a migliorare in tutti i sensi il proprio ambiente di vita (BS 84, 2001: 2)

According to Ikeda, “our president and Mentor”, in fact, the date 3 May 2001 would come to signify the achievement of *Kosen rufu* in Italy. As Macioti (2002a) explains, in Soka Gakkai's vision, *Kosen rufu* means “to declare and widely disseminate Buddhism”. The word appears in the twenty-third chapter of the Lotus Sutra and “indicates the propagation of the True Buddhism, the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin, on a worldwide scale. Also implied, as the concrete result of this dissemination, is the establishment of a long-lasting social peace (11).

President Ikeda, Macioti reports, had spoken more than once about the importance of “having practitioners total a third of the world's population, with another third supporting their endeavours but not practicing, and another third comprised of non-practitioners. The result would be social stability” (Ibid.). Thus, 2001 was for Italian practitioners, the symbolic date in which to celebrate the spread of Buddhism among one third of Italian society.

In 1986, the Japanese parent organisation of the INS supplied additional funds for it to purchase the *Villa Bellagio*, in Florence, which thereafter became Italy's first *kaikan* (cultural centre). (The INS would open another *kaikan* in Milan in 1987, and

eleven more *kaikan* were opened in the following years). The restoration of the *Villa Bellagio*, originally built in 1571 by Cosimo de Medici, was undertaken in accordance with the Council of the Belle Arti and was made possible by the donations (*zaimu*) and the voluntary work of INS members from all over Italy. (NR 343, 2006: 6.) Daisaku Ikeda officially inaugurated the opening of the Florence *kaikan* in 1992.

In 1987, INS became Associazione Italiana Nichiren Shoshu (hereafter AINS) and, that same year, the Italian State formally recognised it as a bona fide legal charity (Ente Morale). Article 3 of the by-laws reads:

The ISG, which has an exclusively lay function, and does not operate for profit or to any political ends, has the purpose of spreading the philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin and promoting human solidarity by contributing to culture, education and the realisation of peace, founded on reciprocal understanding and respect.¹¹

In 1990, following the separation from the Nichiren Shoshu, AINS became known as the Associazione Italiana Soka Gakkai (hereafter “AISG”). The association’s website reports that the AISG had a membership of 13,000 adherents at that time.¹²

Gradually, the successful dissemination of Soka Gakkai in Italy started to attract the interest of some major European scholars, among whom Eileen Barker, Karel Dobbelaere, Liliane Voyè, Arnaldo Nesti and Maria Immacolata Macioti, who in May 1994 were officially invited to visit AISG’s Cultural Centre in Florence (Macioti, 2002a: xxxvii). In 1996, Macioti published *Il Buddha che e’ in noi. Germogli del Sutra del Loto*, the first sociological research on the Italian Soka Gakkai.

¹¹ Reported in Macioti, 2002a: 143.

¹² *Buddismo e Società*. <<http://www.sgi-italia.org/chi/ibisg.html>>.

In 1998, the AISG, which – in a country already occupied linguistically by the Catholic Church – had originally been established as a “lay” institute, became a religious entity (“Ente Religioso”) under the name of the Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai (hereafter “IBISG”). The Newsletter which accompanied the May issue of *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (195, 1998) explained that, although at the beginning an explicit mention to Soka Gakkai’s religious identity had been considered to be inappropriate in Italy, time had now come for Italian members to understand that Soka Gakkai has always been, “essentially and inherently”, a religion:

All’inizio, il riferimento esplicito all’identità religiosa della Soka Gakkai veniva considerato fuori luogo in Italia, ma adesso è arrivato il momento che i membri italiani capiscano che essenzialmente la Soka Gakkai è sempre stata fondamentalmente una religione.

Interviewed by Macioti (2000: 395) Amalia Miglionico, one of the founders of the first Italian Chapter in 1970, declared that

We have always been a religion – in reality this is what Buddhism has always been. Instrumentally, in the beginning we had to avoid highlighting this aspect in order to avoid too much difficulty in a predominantly Catholic Country.

To underline its new religious identity, IBISG changed the name of the magazine *DuemilaUno* into *Buddismo e Società* in the year 2000, to highlight the inseparability of Buddhism and society. From that moment onwards, Soka Gakkai’s members in Italy were asked to be actively involved in the propagation of Buddhism in all spheres of society:

[vogliamo] sottolineare accuratamente la nuova identità religiosa dell’Istituto Buddista Soka Gakkai, un’identità che ribadisce l’inseparabilità fra religione e società. Il nostro impegno nella società italiana diventa ora la *conditio sine qua non* della nostra identità Buddista (BS 84, 2001: 2).

At that time the Italian Soka Gakkai was assuredly the most significant presence of Soka Gakkai International in Europe. Information on the dissemination of Soka Gakkai in Europe can be drawn from Karel Dobbelaere’s study *La Soka Gakkai in Italia, un movimento di laici diventa religione* (1998) which reports the following data:

Nation	Membership (1997)
Italy	19.000
France	8.500
United Kingdom	6.000
Germany	2.000
Spain	500
Netherlands	500
Belgium	300
Denmark	260
Austria	250
Switzerland	250
Sweden	250
Norway	60
Finland	50
Portugal	50
East Europe	100
Totale	38.070 (Total in 1995: 19.000)

Table a: *La Soka Gakkai. Un movimento di laici diventa religione* (Dobbelaere, 1998: 26)

Table a clearly illustrates the strong predominance of Italian converts in Europe. Of the 38,000 SGI members active in 1997, in fact, 20,000 (that is, over half) attended meetings and took part in the activities of the Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai. In 1999, in consequence of its legal recognition as “Ente Religioso”, IBISG became eligible for the benefits bestowed in Italy upon officially recognized religious groups

under the Concordat (*Intesa*). The *Intesa* bestows legal status as a *religione*. In that case, IBISG would be able to claim rights to the *Otto per Mille* tax, and to the same financial benefits that the Italian State allows the Catholic Church for the construction of churches and religious institutions, such as schools and kindergartens, private cemeteries and hospitals. As a “Ente Religioso”, IBISG was also allowed the constitution of a new entity, the “Consiglio dei Ministri di Culto”, an administrative board which includes the names of some who were at one time lay leaders and that are now appointed with the title of Minister of Religion. Also in 1999, after thirty years of exclusive Japanese leadership, an Italian, Giovanni Littera, was finally appointed Vice Direttore Generale of the IBISG. Mr. Littera and his newly appointed Board of Directors would remain in charge until 2005, when they would be replaced by a Japanese, Mr. Tamotsu Nakajima.

The passage from “Ente Morale” to “Ente Religioso” coincided with an authoritarian phase in the life of the new IBISG, a phase in which “bisogna solo obbedire, e senza discutere” (Macioti, 2002b: 1), and resulted in a gradual loss of membership. At the same time, IBISG engaged in a series of public initiatives to reinforce its presence within Italian society. Between 1996 and 2004, the Association sponsored a round of conferences and seminars to encourage reflection on human rights, and a group of photographic exhibits in various Italian cities: “Human Rights in the Contemporary World”; and “Mahatma Gandhi/ Martin Luther King/Daisaku Ikeda: Tre Maestri di Pace tra XX e XXI Secolo”¹³. Among the activities with a social purpose, IBISG has also been concerned with refugees camps, supporting the work of the Consiglio Italiano Rifugiati (CIR), which took over the work of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) after the enactment of the 1991 law on refugees and immigration (Macioti, 2000: 378). The role of IBISG was to collect funds, in

particular through a theatre performance put on by its members. That is, it helped CIR economically but did not organise direct support action for the refugees, and no direct contact between members and refugees now living in Italy was envisaged. Individual Soka Gakkai members also worked in area of conflict (for example, the former Yugoslavia), reporting their experiences at meetings in the form of testimonies (Macioti, Ibid).

The aggressive presence of Soka Gakkai in Italy, its hierarchical organisation and its extreme efforts in enhancing its public image attracted the attention of the media: in 2002 the newspaper *Il Manifesto* published an article entitled “I Forzabuddisti”, which explicitly compares IBISG’s organisational practices to that of Berlusconi’s Political Party *Forza Italia*, and creates the neologism *berluscobuddismo*.¹⁴ Another article, “Il Business del Neobuddismo” underlined Soka Gakkai’s emphasis on *shakubuku* (conversion) and *zaimu* (donations) in the light of the *Intesa*, through which IBISG would be able to access to large segment of the financial benefits that the Italian State allows to its officially recognised religions.¹⁵

In July 2002, after having been repeatedly accused of abusive behaviour against its members (Macioti, 2002c), IBISG was forced to interrupt the legal procedures for the *Intesa*.

In the year 2004, and with a partially renewed Board of Directors, IBISG launched a massive *shakubuku* (conversion) campaign and in July 2005 the President of the Italian Republic granted Daisaku Ikeda the title of “Grande Ufficiale al Merito della

¹³ IBISG: < http://www.sgi-italia.org/cosa/mostra_cp.html >

¹⁴ Annamaria Rivera. “I Forzabbuddisti.” *Il Manifesto*, 08/01/2002.
http://www.scmc.it/forumERM/docs/docs_index.html

¹⁵ Brunella Saccone. “Il Business del Neobuddismo.” *Diario*, 23/11/2003.
http://diario.it/home_diario.php?page=cn03120073

Repubblica Italiana” for his achievements as a philosopher and writer. The title is the highest national honour and is meant to reward merits towards the Nation.¹⁶

In June 2007 the Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai resumed the legal procedures for the *Intesa*,¹⁷ thus completing its process of cultural and linguistic domestication: from its early origins as a *filosofia*, Soka Gakkai was then successfully translated into a *religione* and, finally, into a *Chiesa*.

4.3.2. The Organisational Structure of Soka Gakkai

The organisational design of the local branches of the International Soka Gakkai, as those branches exist on a worldwide basis, reflects the blueprint of the original Japanese parent structure. The design structure is organised along a vertical line, whose strength lies in its personal connection. According to White (1971), each member is:

in a teacher-follower relationship that approximates the “parent-child” relationship characterising so much of social interaction in Japan. He is at once both the follower of his own converter and the teacher of those he himself converts. This vertical interaction, resting on transmission of faith, is constantly stressed; the converter is entrusted not only with instructing the new member in specific articles of faith, but also with ushering him into a diffuse patten of interaction that increases his social ties to the Gakkai and thus, hopefully, his receptivity to its socialising efforts (90).

¹⁶ < www.quirinale.it/onorificienze/dettagliodecorato.asp?idprogressivo=165548&iddecorato=165015 >

¹⁷ Repubblica Italiana. Consiglio dei Ministri.
www.governo.it/presidente/comunicati/testo_int.asp?d=35225

The Japanese organisational structure develops along a vertical line consisting of the unit (*kumi*), which contains up to ten families; the group (*han*), which is made up of five to ten units; the district (*chiku*), which oversees five to ten groups; the chapter (*shibu*), which is made up of five to ten districts; the general chapter (*sho-shibu*), which contains an unspecified number of chapters; the headquarters (*honbu*), which is made up of several general chapters; and the joint headquarters (*sogo honbu*), which oversees several headquarters.

A horizontal line within this structure also exists, in keeping with the time-honoured Japanese tradition of organising activities into sex-segregated groups (Machacek, 2000: 287). Normally, from the age of 35 onwards, members belong to either the men's or the women's division. Before reaching that age, they are affiliated to sex-segregated youth divisions: young men, young women, male students, female students, girls and boys, etc. There are also professional divisions for educators, artists, medical doctors, lawyers, managers, and others, which enable their members to meet periodically to discuss the application of Buddhist principles to their various career choices. For each division, a leader and a vice leader are appointed.

The manner in which these divisions have adapted to conditions outside Japan has varied according to the specific countries in which they have taken root: in Great Britain, for example, there are ethnic and national divisions (Dobbelaere, 2000: 238); Italy, in contrast, has the *Divisione Giovani Mamme* (young mothers division) and the *Divisione Futuro*, for elementary schools' pupils. In addition, and as Machacek (2000) notes, outside Japan the organisation has ceased the more traditional practice of appointing leadership positions on the basis of personal mentor-disciple relationships. Instead, leaders are "selected on the basis of demonstrated commitment to the religion and specific skills and abilities" (290).

As already seen in Chapter 3, the strategic accommodation of SGI abroad was aimed at deviating from the rigidity of the original Japanese model, to the point that, according to Wilson and Dobbelaere’s study on Soka Gakkai’s adaptation in Britain (1994), SGI’s organisational structure is an expression of “the strong democratic and egalitarian emphasis of SG-UK” (166). Dobbelaere (2002) further maintains that “Soka Gakkai is more like a network of groups, in which members associate easily and freely, than a hierarchical organisation”(237).

The situation seems to be different in Italy, where Macioti (2002a), commenting upon the existence of “squads”, “companies”, and “wards”, speaks of the SG design as “an organisation of a para-military type” (35).

The Italian branch of Soka Gakkai is based on divisions into the *gruppo* (group), the *settore* (sector), the *capitolo* (chapter), the *honbu* (district), the *territorio* (region) and the area, and within each of these divisions the overall structure resembles a pyramid:

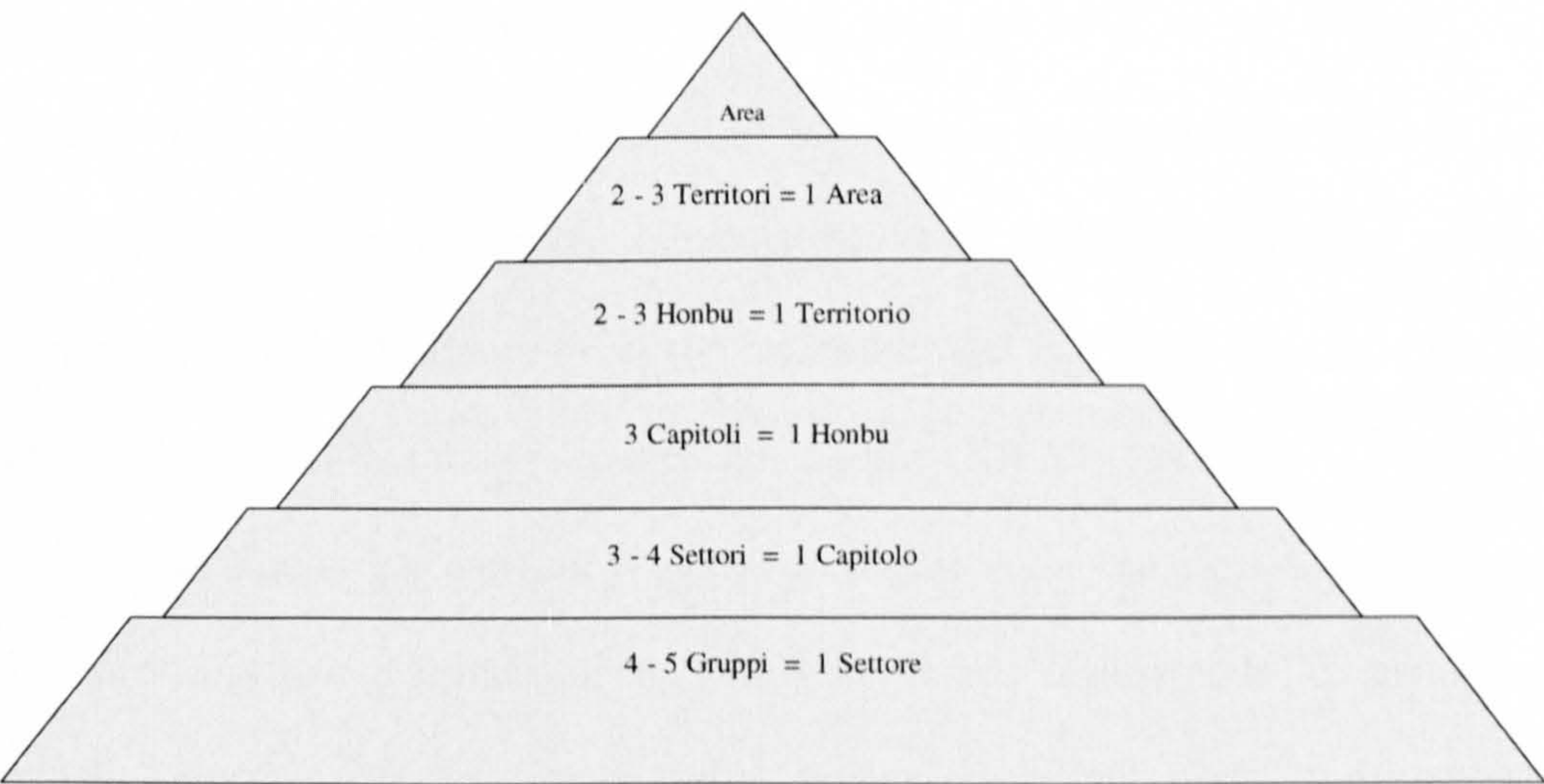


Fig. 3. The Organisational Structure of Soka Gakkai in Italy

The group meeting is known in Italy as *zadankai*, which is the Japanese for “discussion meeting”. Each group, which is composed of about 10 to 15 people of all ages and regardless of their gender, gathers every two weeks, generally the first and third Thursday of the month, and always at the same time, so as to make it easier for members to schedule their attendance on a regular basis.

At the top of the group are the leader and the vice leader (*Responsabile* and *Vice Responsabile*), usually of different gender, perhaps, as Macioti (2002a) comments “so as to better meet the needs of the members, men and women, or perhaps to improve interpersonal communication” (37). *Zadankai* takes place at the leader’s house or at some previously established *luogo di riunione*. In accordance to Nichiren Daishonin’s *goshō* which claims that “more valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all” (WND: 851), the act of offering one’s house as a *luogo di riunione* (i.e. a “meeting place” to host the *zadankai*) is considered to be a source of benefits, as it enhances “the treasures of the heart”. Thus, it is very important for members to preserve a standard meeting place, and careful instructions are given to ensure that the meeting does not create problems for the neighbours that could cause the meeting place to have to be changed. *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* stresses the importance of “fare una buona impressione” (“making a good impression”), and explicitly recommends that at the end of the *zadankai* people do not congregate on the landings or in the stairwells and hallways. The group leader is in charge to see to it that the group disbands rapidly (NR 334, 2005: 5).

The discussion meeting provides an occasion for chanting *daimoku* and reciting the sutra together. It usually opens with *esperienze*, “testimonials” of members telling briefly how their life has changed after joining the organisation. After that, President Ikeda’s speeches are read and commented upon. If there are new converts, the group leaders will intervene to provide explanations on how to engage in a correct practice

and will encourage other members to share their experiences as well. As Macioti (2002a) describes,

The meeting is planned, and not subject to the fancy of the moment. ‘Experiences’ are not improvised, but selected ahead of time. And it is the leader – or whoever can speak, review, correct, or decide to act on the leader’s behalf – who is responsible for the success of the discussion meeting, and for creating and maintaining a joyful atmosphere” (38).

A joyful atmosphere is considered to be fundamental for a successful *zadankai*, and members are selected ahead of the meeting to chant to create *itai doshin*¹⁸ and to provide additional support behind the scenes.

Zadankai is considered to be the basis for *kosen rufu*, a Japanese word which Soka Gakkai translates as “world-wide propagation of Nichiren’s doctrine” (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 256). *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (334, 2005: 3-5) underlines the importance of *zadankai* and explains that the origin of the tradition of gathering together to discuss Buddhism originates from Nichiren Daishonin’s desire as expressed in his *Sado Gosho*:

There is little writing paper here in the province of Sado, and to write to you individually would take too long. Nevertheless, if even one person fails to hear from me, it will cause resentment. Therefore, I want people with seeking minds to meet and read this letter together for encouragement (WND: 301).

Il Nuovo Rinascimento (ibid.) encourages to think of Soka Gakkai as “una grande famiglia di amici”, where the effort of each member is fundamental to “create una

¹⁸ *Itai doshin* is a Japanese term which refers to the Buddhist principle of “different in body, one in mind” (see also Chapter 5). In common Buddhist parlance it is often considered as a synonym for “armonia”.

grande armonia”, and provides more detailed instruction on how to prepare a successful *zadankai*:

è come preparare una cena tra amici: in quelle occasioni si presta attenzione a ogni particolare, si decide un menù che vada bene per tutti e si scelgono con cura gli ingredienti (3).

The act of preparing the *zadankai* is paralleled to the act of preparing a good dinner among friends. On such occasions, one pays particular attention to the details, and decides upon a menu that everyone will enjoy. All the ingredients must be carefully chosen, and the most important ingredient is the “spirit of offerings”, i.e. the desire to offer and share one’s experience with other people, in accordance with the *gosho* that declares: “Our desire is to share this blessing equally with all people, and we, together with them, will attain Buddhahood” (WND: 1002).

Il Nuovo Rinascimento continues with a military image, and parallels the group leader to a soldier, “in prima linea” in the battle for *kosen rufu*. Again, Nichiren’s *gosho* is quoted for support:

Even the words “those who join the battle are all in the front lines” derives from the Lotus sutra. This is what is meant by the passage “if they should expound some texts of the secular world or speak on matters of government or occupations that sustain life, they will in all cases conform to the correct Law.” Therefore, you must summon up the great power of faith more than ever (WND: 1000).

From “the front lines”, the leader receives the new guests, and explains the fundamentals of the doctrine. Without an “actual proof”, however, the doctrine would result in a mere theoretical exposition of principles. For this reason, it is vital that the

guests hear the *esperienze* instead of the *filosofia*, to understand that “it is the heart that is important” (WND: 1000).

Zadankai is only one type of meeting. Members are warmly recommended to attend monthly “study meetings”. Study meetings are held in a high level of formality, with a senior leader (*honbu* or area leaders) lecturing the members on the *gosho* or on a particular passage of Ikeda’s speeches. Parallel meetings are held for *naitoku* (beginners) and *shinrai* (guests) to introduce them on the fundamental principles of Soka Gakkai’s Buddhism.

Other meetings are scheduled on monthly bases for each peer-division (*Divisione Adulti*, *Divisione Giovani*, etc.). A *Meeting Responsabili* normally takes place once a month. At such meetings, Soka Gakkai’s leaders report to their senior *Responsabile* on their various activities. At the same time, senior leaders from the higher ranks give instruction on future activities to be performed in accordance with the national guidelines. Following the pyramidal structure, the *gruppo* reports to the *settore*, the *settore* reports to the *capitolo*, and up to the *area*. The area reports directly to the General Director.

More meetings and training courses are scheduled for staff members. Because the association is based on volunteerism, members are encouraged to donate their time and their talents for a variety of purposes. Staff groups bear very evocative names: *Donne Diamante* is in charge of cleaning the *kaikan* (cultural centres) and all common areas; *Donne Corallo* takes care of food catering and of the various behind-the-scenes activities, such as the technical organisation of large meetings; *Loto* are the gardeners; *Prometeo* are the drivers in charge of large-scale transport movements.¹⁹ Volunteerism, as Macioti observes (2002a: 55), typically counts for a great deal in new religious movements. The support is so strong that even the few people who draw a salary from

¹⁹ A complete list of Staff Groups can be found in *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* 362, 2006: 4.

their work (as in the case of the editorial board of *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* and *Buddismo e Società*) “work hours well beyond a normal work day, and [...] they can go on working until very late at night, without taking Sundays or other holidays off, especially if they are doing the closeout for publications” (Ibid.)

One group in particular, *Statistica & Segreteria* (Statistics and Accounting) is of great relevance for the life of the organisation. *Segreteria* registers the voluntary contributions (*zaimu*). The organisation is self-financed with money from membership subscriptions to movement publications, and every new member is encouraged to subscribe (Macioti, 2002a: 53). Until 1995, leaders collected subscriptions, but from 1996 members can subscribe directly by mail. In addition, profits are also derived from the sale of candles that members use to offer to the *Gohonzon* and from the sale of small cabinets, or *butsudan*, in which the *Gohonzon* is enshrined. The money derived from such activities, however, would not be enough to support the complex organisational network. For this reason, members are asked to make voluntary financial contributions. It is important to note that contributions are not accepted from beginners in the faith, i.e. from those members who are still without a *Gohonzon*. Contributions, Macioti (2002a) notes, do not involve a statutory obligation: “one has (or should have) at heart the spirit of offering for the purpose of *Kosen rufu*. It should not be considered a burdensome obligation, but rather a matter of great pride” (56). Soka Gakkai tradition explains the word *zaimu* (which in plain Japanese means “finance”) as a compound of the ideograms *zai* (treasure) and *mu* which “indica il diritto-dovere di sostenere l’organizzazione o la comunità a cui si appartiene” (NR 358, 2006: 6). Thus, Soka Gakkai’s members are encouraged to think of their financial contribution as a “right-duty” towards their organisation. As *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (Ibid.) points out, Nichiren himself received support from his disciples. At that time, offers were in the form of money, food, clothes, and everything that could sustain Nichiren’s life. Today, offering money is important to

keep alive and develop the movement which propagates Nichiren teachings : “l’offerta e’ essenzialmente in denaro e ha lo scopo di mantenere in vita e far sviluppare il movimento che propaga il suo insegnamento” (Ibid.). The article then quotes a small section of *gosho* which reads: “you may think you offered gift to the treasure tower of the Thus Come One Many Treasures, but that is not so. You offered them to yourself” (WND: 299) to underline that, being Soka Gakkai essential in the spreading of *Kosen rufu* it is completely fitting to view the support of a group which carries out the work of the Buddha as an offering to the Buddha himself:

al giorno d’oggi il movimento di Kosen Rufu e’ diffuso in tutto il mondo grazie alla Soka Gakkai. E’ quindi del tutto naturale considerare il sostegno a un gruppo che svolge l’opera del Buddha come un’offerta al Buddha stesso (NR 358, 2006: 6).

Attendance at meetings is recorded for statistical purposes, and participants are registered according to their status of “guest”, “beginner” and “member”. Italian Soka Gakkai devotes great efforts to explain the importance of statistics. After underlining that Soka Gakkai exists with the purpose of helping each individual to obtain the maximum benefit from the practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (NR 369, 2007: 6) maintains that statistic represents a vital part of *kosen rufu*, as Nichiren Daishonin himself was constantly aware in his time of the numeric variations of the persons who chanted *Nam-myoho-renge kyo*:

Nichiren Daishonin stesso era costantemente consapevole delle variazioni numeriche delle persone che recitavano Nam-myoho-renge kyo al suo tempo. E’ molto importante avere una idea precisa dello sviluppo statistico, in altre parole, le statistiche rappresentano un tratto vitale di *kosen rufu* (Ibid.)

For this reason, each Soka Gakkai leader must have exact knowledge of who their members are in order to keep in mind “all the persons whom we don’t see often, all those who only attend meetings now and then, all those who haven’t participated in a long while, as well as all those who have distanced themselves from the practice and whom we may never have know” (Ibid.). Also, a good *Responsabile* must be aware of the fluctuations in attendance at meetings, of the progress of the *zaimu* and of the number of member’s subscriptions to SG’s publications:

La statistica ci serve per tenere in mente tutte le persone che non vediamo spesso, che frequentano le riunioni saltuariamente, che non partecipano da molto tempo, o anche quelli che si sono allontanati dalla pratica e noi non abbiamo mai conosciuto. Un responsabile deve conoscere l’andamento delle presenze alle riunioni negli ultimi sei mesi, e anche il progresso dello *zaimu* e degli abbonamenti alle nostre riviste (Ibid.)

Il Nuovo Rinascimento then quotes Daisaku Ikeda, who declares that statistics is “a noble battle for *kosen rufu*”:

Fare il lavoro statistico per *kosen rufu* significa costruire solide basi per il futuro dell’Ultimo Giorno della Legge. Questo lavoro e’ una nobile battaglia per proteggere la Soka Gakkai in accordo con il volere del Buddha e vuol dire, in definitiva, proteggere tutti i compagni di fede che sono tutti Buddha. Percio’ non c’e’ alcun dubbio che gli sforzi che fate in tal senso accumuleranno grandi benefici e buona fortuna (Ibid.)

Statistical data must be constantly updated, to monitor the transitions towards the ceremony of conversion.

4.3.3. The Ceremony of Conversion: the Importance of Ritual in the Perception of Buddhism as a *Religione*

During the years, the rules and the traditions which codified the path towards a lifetime membership have considerably changed. In her 1996 study, Macioti (2002a) commented that in Italy “converting to Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism is a slow process; it follows an itinerary that is carefully planned and evaluated. It has nothing of Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus”(23). Indeed, until 1990, the members converted to the Nichiren Shosha according to a rigid protocol. After one month of correct practice, in which the *shinrai* (postulant) had learned the pronunciation of the sutra (*gongyo*), he or she could become *naitoku* (beginner). The status of *naitoku* had three phases (*naitoku C*, *naitoku B*, *naitoku A*) corresponding to a two-year curriculum of compulsory study meetings. In preparation for the *gojukai* ceremony, the *naitoku* had to acquire knowledge of the principal writings of Nichiren Daishonin, and had to become familiar with the bulk of Japanese terms and philosophical principles that characterise Nichiren’s Buddhism. The importance that the Italian Soka Gakkai traditionally attributed to study meetings is underlined by Dobbelaere (1999) who describes the *esami di studio*, internal examinations that the Study Department prepares for its members. The study curriculum is divided into five levels with increasing degrees of difficulty. The highest degree, normally achieved after 10 years of study, confers the title of *professore* (38). According to data collected in 1993, Dobbelaere reports, in Italy 43% of members had passed the beginners level, 11% had passed the first level and 5% had passed the second level (Ibid.)

After their trial period, new converts could apply for official admission. The application was evaluated by the senior leaders of the association who, in the tradition of the “visite a casa” (home visits) had to visit the convert’s home to “verificare l’idoneità del luogo e l’accettazione da parte della famiglia”(NR 325, 2005: 5), i.e. to

evaluate if the place is appropriate to hold the object of worship and to evaluate if the convert's family is willing to accept it. In the case of minors, in particular, Soka Gakkai requests the parent's consent. Although sincerity of faith is a prerequisite for conversion, other factors had to be evaluated. As Macioti (2002a) reports,

One must also be aware that this movement, and other analogous to it, may attract people who live deeply depressed lives, and who might have suicidal tendencies. Their cases must be carefully evaluated, requiring special attention and a great deal of caution. Such cases could, in the event of a negative outcome, cast a shadow over the organisation and discredit it. Thus, the organisation is very careful to avoid that type of problem and safeguard its image (22).

Although dictated by Soka Gakkai's extreme attention to protect its members, these norms developed in time into a bureaucratic and rigid procedure, strictly observed by over-zealous *Responsabili* :

One carefully considers each case before admitting people suffering from mental illness (or who may have substance abuse problems), even though leaders are reminded not to be excessively strict. One cannot expect the same behaviour from a beginner as from a practitioner. The beginner, it is explained, has not yet attained "a perfect condition" – in fact, she has not yet even received the *Gohonzon* – and *leaders* would do well to remember that when making their evaluations (Macioti, Ibid.)

When admission was finally granted, the novice became, through the *gojukai* ceremony, a member of both Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai. The *gojukai* ceremony²⁰ was held in the presence of Soka Gakkai's *Responsabili* and a Nichiren Shoshu priest, who came from Japan for the occasion. After the recitation of *gongyo*, the priest asked three

questions. With the first question, the convert was asked to abandon “*insegnamenti provvisori*” (provisional teachings). With the second questions, the convert was asked to abandon the errors derived from practicing “*insegnamenti provvisori*” and to embrace the “true invocation”; the “true object of devotion”, and the “true sanctuary of the Law”, i.e. the *Daimoku*, the *Gohonzon*, the Lotus Sutra. The third question inquired into the convert’s ability to follow the definitive teaching of the Lotus Sutra for the rest of one’s life. The converts answered the three questions with “*Io posso*” (I can). Afterwards, each person was called by name, and approached the priest with an open *gongyo* book. The priest touched the crown of each new member’s head with the *Gohonzon*, and dropped it in between the pages of the *gongyo* booklet. Upon returning to their seats, the members wrapped their *Gohonzon* in the *fukushi*, a special kerchief that President Ikeda traditionally sent as a gift to welcome the new members.

After the *gojukai* ritual, the *Gohonzon* was taken home to be placed in the *butsudan* the special cabinet built for the purpose. The opening of a home *Gohonzon* usually took the form of a special ceremony held at each members house. Friends would arrive with gifts for the new member (usually potted plants, to symbolise “living faith”) and then, after the recitation of the Sutra, a *Responsabile* would wear white gloves and hung the *Gohonzon* scroll in the *butsudan*.

4.3.4. From Nichiren Shoshu to IBISG: the Domestication of the Ritual

Nichiren Shoshu’s tradition is founded upon the existence of the “Great Secret Laws”: the Invocation (i.e. chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*), the Object of Devotion (the *Gohonzon*), and the Sanctuary (the place where the Object of Devotion is kept)

²⁰ Also described in Macioti, 2002a: 23-24; and in NR 106, 1990: 3.

(Murata, 1969: 51). On 28 April 1253 *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* was invoked for the first time. On 12 October 1279, the *Dai-Gohonzon* was inscribed and later located at *Taisekiji*, the head temple of the Nichiren Shoshu. Smaller copies were, over time, transcribed by high priests and sent to believers (Ibid., 52). The *Gohonzon* scrolls that the converts received during the *gojukai* ceremony, were issued under the authority of Nichiren Shosu's High Priest, who inscribed an original with his sacralizing hands. From the original, copies were printed by a wood-block process (*okatagi*) and then conferred on the members. In practitioners' homes, those parchments transform the house into a kind of sanctuary.

With the separation from Nichiren Shoshu in 1990-1, the clergy was no longer available to perform the *kaigen* (the opening of the eyes) ceremony. *Kaigen* derives from the *gosho* known as *Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images* (WND: 85) in which Nichiren describes the sacred practice of "infusing images with soul". The ceremony was traditionally performed in order for the *Gohonzon* to manifest itself as the Eternal Living Buddha (Van Bragt, 1993: 16).

From 1990 to 1994 Soka Gakkai's members worldwide were unable to receive the *Gohonzon*, until Soka Gakkai circulated a study on "The transmission and the Heritage of the Mystic Law" to support the conviction that the *kaigen* ceremony could not be considered as a prerequisite for the sacrality of the *Gohonzon*.²¹ Thus, copies of *Gohonzon* drawn from the one transcribed by the High Priest Nichikan Shonin in 1720 could be legitimated.²² In 1994 Soka Gakkai asked its members to return Nichiren Shosu's "copies of the *Gohonzon*, which were to be substituted with Soka

²¹ The study is the result of a series of seminars held in Japan between 1992 and 1994, with participation of representatives from The International Soka Gakkai's Study Department, The Association for the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu, and the Association of Young Priests for the Reformation of Nichiren. The proceedings of the study are published in Italy as: Istituto Soka Gakkai (1997-1998). *Il Caso Nichiren Shoshu*. Firenze: Edizioni Istituto Soka Gakkai.

²² For a detailed description of the events that lead to Soka Gakkai's decision to utilise Nichikan Shonin's *Gohonzon*, see Jan Van Bragt, 1993.

Gakkai's copies. The magazine *DuemilaUno* (51, 1995) devoted an issue to calm the reactions that such decision had arisen, and provided doctrinal support to conclude that "the basis for transmission [of the Mystical law] is the lifeblood of faith" (16). Faith is the factor that determines the "heritage to ensure the protection and propagation of the Gohonzon" (ibid). To ensure propagation, "it is indispensable to have a harmoniously united society of practitioners who maintain the lifeblood of faith" (ibid.).

It is appropriate to view the *DuemilaUno* article, and the subsequent series of meetings organised in all Italian major cities, as the Soka Gakkai's first step in the shaping of its religious identity in Italy. The conviction of ISG, as expounded in the article, as well as in the pamphlets that circulated among members afterwards, is that Nichiren Shoshu's High Priest had consistently ignored and failed to live up to Nichiren's desire for "unity among its disciples". As the only association of lay people committed to *Kosen rufu*, the Soka Gakkai could be considered the "treasure of the priest", and, in virtue of that fact, the organization was legitimately entitled to confer the *Gohonzon*. Accordingly, it was appropriate that Nichikan Shonin's *Gohonzon*, enshrined in a temple affiliated to Soka Gakkai, should serve as an original for reproduction in virtue of the priest's "pure faith".

As the *DuemilaUno* article proceeds to explain (18), Nichikan, who became the 26th High Priest in 1718, was a reformer who devoted great efforts to re-establish the exact interpretation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. "On the whole", Macioti commented in 1996:

there has been a noticeable effort at rereading Nichiren's texts and the history of the high priests with the aim of reassuring the members, and of strengthening in them the conviction that the split with the priesthood has not put ISG at a disadvantage, or created a crisis as regards the *object of devotion*. Although it is a problem that is still very much felt, ISG seems to have in a large measure resolved it, given the widespread, positive response on the part of the members

to the request to return the previous *Gohonzon*, and substitute it with the Nichikan *Gohonzon* (Macioti, 2002a: 33).

As Macioti (2002a: 25) notes, however, the separation from Nichiren Shoshu created among Italian adherents a sense of uneasiness regarding the *Gohonzon* conferral, as the *gojukai* ritual, with its priests and sacral dimension was felt as a vital part of their religious experience. For this reason, Italian Soka Gakkai decided to re-establish the *gojukai* ceremony. At each local Cultural Centre, senior *Responsabili* replaced the priesthood in the *Gohonzon* conferral, and the ritual phrases of acceptance were replaced by the new convert's reading of his or her favourite excerpt of Ikeda's speech, followed by the solemn promise that "I will devote my entire life to the cause of *Kosen rufu* and the eternal development of Soka Gakkai".

In general, the priesthood issue is a problem that had caused distress and bewilderment, and induced some to abandon Soka Gakkai or their practice (Macioti, 2002a: 33). It is not possible however to calculate the exact number of defections, since members can either choose to officially return the *Gohonzon*, thereby severing their association with the Soka Gakkai, or simply cease to take part to the organisation's activities. Defections, however, have been counterbalanced by an ever-increasing number of new conversions. As the next chapter is going to illustrate, Italian Soka Gakkai has, in time, managed to rewrite some of its religious tenets, modelling itself on the blueprint of the Catholic tradition, and it might be possible to suggest that the movement today owes its success precisely to the introduction of the peculiar elements that constitutes an Italian religious background.

5

SOKA GAKKAI IN ITALY: LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES

As Chapter 4 has attempted to demonstrate, the sense of identity in Italy is still strongly linked to the religious collective memory that the Roman Church has successfully built across the centuries. Although many members of Italian society depart from the codes of conduct that are explicitly enjoined on them by the Church, they nevertheless continue to act broadly in accordance with values acquired during public socialisation. In spite of an overall picture of a society with rising levels of indifference towards religion in moral and spiritual level of religious practice, religious language still frames the tropes of humanistic ideals on earth such as love, justice, peace and solidarity. A strong respect for most of the religiously celebrated rites of passage remains embedded in social practices and Roman Catholicism survives as the only ordered system of beliefs and values to which most Italians still subscribe to. Italian religious memory, with its references to Catholic language, social practices and reverence for charismatic figures, has deeply influenced the perception of Soka Gakkai Buddhism among its Italian adherents.

5.1. Converting to an Oxymoron: a “Lay Religion”

At the time of its initial diffusion into Italy as the lay branch of the Japanese Nichiren Shoshu, Soka Gakkai was one among the group of *filosofie orientali* to which a larger public, beginning in the 1960s, had access to thanks to pop music, movies and translations (Introvigne, 1989: 26). There is general agreement (Bellah, 1976; Robbins, 1988) that the set of expressive ideals brought about by new movements of political protest and cultural experimentation had engendered a search for spiritual expression that the traditional Christian and utilitarian culture of the West no longer seemed capable of satisfying. To a youth culture – in Italy as well as in many other Western countries – that seemed to have been stricken with a crisis of meaning, groups such as Soka Gakkai, Transcendental Meditation, Sai Baba Sangha and the Maharishi Group, appeared to many to hold potential answers worth exploring in the 1970s and 1980s.

As often happens in the case of New Religions, Soka Gakkai attracted “people who had felt ill at ease or negative about their chosen role within the family unit or with respect to society at large” (Macioti, 1996: 39) and seek happiness through meditation. As it emerges from the *esperienze* (personal testimonials published monthly in *Il Nuovo Rinascimento*), the common denominator among people attending SG’s meetings is that, notwithstanding their different backgrounds (both former Catholics and/or individuals dissatisfied with religious practices in general), they all found various degrees of difficulty in having their practice described as *religione*.

Underlying the semantic overlapping with the practices of the Roman Catholic Church that the appellation of “religion” would have triggered, Riccardo Pacci, today a senior leader within Soka Gakkai, remembers how in the early days the recruitment of new converts took place in private houses, where friends were often invited under the pretext of a dinner party. During these “parties”, in which there were endless

discussions over the mysteries of life, Soka Gakkai's Buddhism was always rigorously defined as a "philosophy" (NR 372, 2007: 16-20). Generally, on their first attendance at SG's meetings people were encouraged to think of Buddhism as a "way of life" (NR June 1987: 8) – a broad definition that acted as the perfect umbrella-phrase under which each new convert could hope to find an answer to his or her spiritual needs. Every possible connection between the word Buddhism and the word *religione* – with its rigid, institutional overtones – was strongly discouraged:

We read Kerouac, Ginsberg and the Beat Generation authors. Our model was the anarchist Bakunin – we even played in a band named "Bakunin Jazz Quartet". We simply wanted to be different from the others. For this reason, the idea of practicing a *religione* was something that we simply could not accept (Riccardo Pacci, NR June 1987: 10).

The first years of Soka Gakkai in Italy were characterised by two different linguistic choices, with sometimes macroscopic differences between the written, official language of SG's publications, and the oral language of *shakubuku*. Thus, although in the written form Soka Gakkai's practices have always been clearly defined as deriving from the Buddhist religion, oral conversation enacted a series of linguistic "equivalences": in their personal testimonials, early converts referred to Buddhism as *la Pratica* (the Practice) or *la cosa giapponese* (the Japanese "thing") (NR 104, 1990: 18).

In preparation for the ceremony of *gojukai*, the final step of conversion, which entails the acknowledgement of Buddhism as a "religion", a series of meetings were organised to familiarise the convert with the identity of Soka Gakkai as a "lay religion without priests and clergy", a syntactic operation aimed at neutralising the overlap between "religion" and "Catholicism". Carlo Barone (2005) observes that:

It should be noticed that new converts are not told that they have to renounce their Catholic beliefs, although this is what usually happens if they stay within SG. I noticed that similarities or even commonalities between Buddhist and Catholic teachings are frequently stressed by the members. At the same time, criticism against the Catholic Church takes the form of benevolent wit and subtle irony, for example against restrictions on believers or Catholic “superstitions” concerning the existence of God. In sum, a soft conversion strategy is adopted and, given the considerable cultural discontinuity between Buddhism and the Catholic tradition, this seems a rational solution.¹

As already seen in Chapter 3, this strategy is part of a general low tension orientation towards the mainstream culture, which aims at presenting Soka Gakkai Buddhism in an harmonious relationship with its host environment. This accommodating orientation toward the Western culture and its traditional values, however, does not result from some “natural affinity”. Rather, as Barone (2005) comments, “it is the result of a deliberate selection from the SG cultural repertoire of the elements that seem most compatible with the Western culture”. In this sense, it can be understood as a form of strategic adaptation aimed at ensuring cultural continuity with Italian conventional beliefs. The idea of a “lay religion without clergy” proved to be an irresistible oxymoron, and its protean adaptability fascinated both new converts interested in secular form of spirituality and new converts in search of alternative religious horizons.

The Catholic substratum, with its corollary of sin and guilt, was not easy to eradicate, and emerges heavily in the testimonials of early converts. One member explicitly declares that “the *Gohonzon* scared me, When I tried to chant *daimoku* I was filled with fear of punishment and with fears deriving from my previous religion” (NR 80, 1988: 23). Another member underlines the problems encountered after her parents became aware of her new faith: “They thought that by rejecting [my former religion] I

¹ Carlo Barone (2005) < http://www.cesnur.org/2005/pa_barone.htm >.

was rejecting all the moral values in which I was brought up. This became the source of constant tension among us, and caused a great deal of suffering” (NR May 1987: 16). Similarly, another member tells how his mother reacted to his new religious beliefs by simply throwing him out of the house (NR 73, 1988: 16).

5.2. In Search for a New Vocabulary

Soka Gakkai’s members also encountered a certain degree of difficulty in adjusting Japanese rituals to an Italian vocabulary in which such terms as *altare*, *fede* or *preghiera* were felt to denote inherently Christian practices. Here, it may be useful to keep in mind that the Counter-Reformation, through which the Roman Catholic Church sought to codify its religious practices, also coincided in Italy with the initial codification of the Italian language, which only began to emerge from the plethora of regional dialects that contained local idioms and Latinate contaminations in the sixteenth century (Migliorini, 1960\1994: 281-370). The Council of Trent (1563) took place precisely in this same period, and played a major role in shaping and influencing the formation of the Italian language. For the Church, the switch from a classical (Latin) language to a popular language was inevitable, given the Church’s desire to spread the word of God in an idiom familiar to ordinary people. Although the liturgy of the Mass remained in Latin and translation of the Bible was severely condemned, preaching and catechesis had to be conducted in the vernacular of the day in order to ensure that church-goers were appropriately instructed on the correct practices prescribed by the Church, and to discourage para-liturgical, popular and private devotions (Noel, 1980: 89). During this period, the Catholic Church produced a large amount of literature on the art of conducting sermons and public preaching that contained precise indications on the appropriate lexical choices and syntactic constructions. The blueprint of

contemporary spoken Florentine was used to organise and normalise the different vernaculars (Pozzi, 1997: 3-44). A large number of words pertaining to the devotional sphere thus emerged from Latin and regional variations and were codified and crystallised in their present Italian form, both oral and written. In this respect, it can be said that the Roman Catholic Church was a fundamental agent in the creation of the Italian language in general, and in the canonisation of religious language in particular. During this period, Bruno Migliorini (1984) notes, many words referring to religious matters – such as *spirito*, *martire*, *diavolo*, *destino*, *preghiera* – found their way from ecclesiastical Latin into the vulgar tongue, and “were constantly subject to a certain degree of correction by references to the form heard in Church” (109).

As a result, all the words pertaining to the area of the sacred, and in particular for the verb *pregare* (to pray), were overlain with a specifically Catholic meaning. An Italian approach to Buddhism, which is founded upon the non-existence of a divine entity, but nevertheless requires daily prayers to an Object of Worship (the *Gohonzon*), inevitably generates a cultural short-circuit, as the Italian mind struggles to translate the *Gohonzon* according to its pre-existing semantic category of “god”: “How can you tell me that Buddhism has no gods” – asks a new convert – “when then you ask me to *pregare* to the *Gohonzon*?” (NR 90, 1989: 18). The text of the *gongyo* prayers created a further confusion, as Italian members began to attach mysterious or supernatural meanings to their relation with the *Gohonzon*. Until 1991 the text of the first prayer read:

I offer gratitude to Bonten, Taishaku, Nitten, Gatten, Myojoten and all other *Shoten Zenjin*, the universal forces within all life, sworn guardians of the Lotus Sutra, who night and day protect those who embrace the *Gohonzon*.

In Nichiren's Buddhism, the compound *shoten zenjin* traditionally meant to indicate the "ancillary forces of nature".² As already illustrated in Chapter 2, the reference to supernatural beings is central to the polytheistic nature of Buddhism, which had inherited and elaborated its pantheon from various traditions. In particular, Bonten is the Great Heavenly King Brahma, the Hindu deity who created the universe and who, with his four heads, guards the four directions (Mitchel, 1982: 2). His figure is central both to Hindu and Buddhist tradition, to the point that his iconographic representation often remains unchanged in India and in Japan. Taishaku is Indra, god of thunder and storm, Nitten, Gatten and Myojoten are the Vedic deities Surya, Candra, and Aruna, which personify the sun, the crescent moon and the stars (Ibid.: v-xv). The importance of these figures is relevant in Japanese Buddhist Tradition, and Nichiren Daishonin himself includes their names in the *Gohonzon*, as personification of the Bodhisattvas Bonten, Taishaku, Kannon, Seishi, Kokuzo.³

Among Italian members, the perception of *shoten zenjin* as "benevolent and protective creatures" produced such a strong metonymic affiliation with the popular Catholic prayer to the Guardian Angel (*Angelo Custode*) that a series of articles (NR October 1983: 4; NR 121, 1992: 6) was necessary to correct the misinterpretation of the prayer. The phenomenon may be related to the vast Miracle Tradition which is

² Sho is composed of two characters. On the left are sounds coming from a mouth. On the right are the trunk and branches of a tree. Together, it means "all; every; each thing. Ten is a person with a line above the head. The line indicates heaven – that which is above humans. Zen is composed of a goat (on top) and a mouth (on the bottom), indicating "words which are gentle – like sheep". It means "beneficial; friendly; good". Jin is composed of two characters. On the left are the sun, moon and stars shedding their light on the world. By itself, it means "illumination from heaven". On the right are hands holding a rope. It means "to extend". The whole character means "heaven extending itself to all living beings". All things (Sho) are divine (Ten) bringing benefit. The beneficial (Zen) light from heaven extends (Jin) itself to humans. *The Imagery of Nichiren's Lotus Sutra*. <http://www.gakkaionline.net/Imagery/SZ.html>.

³ *Dictionnaire des termes bouddiques*. <http://www.nichiren-etudes.net/projet.htm>.

grounded in the theology of the Catholic Church and still permeates a vast segment of popular literature and folk Italian traditions.⁴

The text of the first prayer was revised at the international level in 1991, in accordance with Soka Gakkai's attention to the Western religious market, within which it seeks to present itself as an universal religion by avoiding references to the gods, spirits, and other supernatural beings which fill Japanese Buddhist tradition in general and Nichiren's doctrine in particular. Today, the prayer simply reads:

I offer appreciation to the functions in life and the environment (*shoten zenjin*) that serve to protect us, and I pray that these protective powers be further strengthened through my practice of the Law.

Notwithstanding this simplification, however, the idea of the *shoten zenjin* as *angeli custodi* survives today in Italian Buddhist parlance, where they are sometimes referred to as *shoten custodi* (NR 315, 2004: 7).

Until 1998, the Italian Soka Gakkai was known as an "Ente Morale", a non-religious body which, as its charter explicitly stated, was devoted to cultural activities. Although Italian practitioners may have been reassured by their status as members of a non-religious entity, they displayed varying degrees of difficulty when it came to accommodating their new beliefs to everyday life. Doubts were often expressed concerning the rites of passage, which in Italy are traditionally performed within the Catholic Church. "Could a Buddhist couple still have a traditional Church marriage?"; "Could it be still appropriate to attend funeral services or baptism ceremonies?"; and even "Are we still allowed to enter a Church, if only to admire its artworks?".

⁴ On the subject, see Giovanni Pozzi (1997) *Grammatica e Retorica dei Santi*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.

To answer these questions, *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (NR 87, 1989: 10) devoted a page to reassuring its members about the compatibility of Buddhism and domestic cultural practices. The article opens by acknowledging the inclination to fanaticism “inherent to our religious culture” and urges readers to balance “faith and common sense”.

Although advocating a non-sectarian understanding of the Buddhist faith, the article is built on the dichotomy between “us” (Buddhists) and “the others”, and revolves around the central mission of *shakubuku* (conversion). In our everyday practices, “we” must carefully avoid creating a negative response to our behaviours. “We” must build up a “buona reputazione” in order for “the others” to accept – and possibly convert to – Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. “We” must never forget that *shakubuku* is “la nostra missione”.

As this chapter will further illustrate, *shakubuku* is one among the many Japanese terms which Italian Soka Gakkai choose to leave untranslated. This foreignisation strategy was primarily aimed at reducing the impact of the Italian religious (Catholic) vocabulary in an attempt to stress the difference between the Catholic and Buddhist religions. During its early days, however, this strategy also had a functional side to it in that it underlined the distinction between the lay identity of Soka Gakkai and the religious identity of its parent sect, the Nichiren Shoshu, in order to ease the recruitment of new adherents who would not accept the idea of practicing a “religion proper”. Thus, Soka Gakkai could be presented as a lay movement, whose members would actively work toward the realisation of long-lasting social peace in the world under the guidance of President Ikeda. The religious elements of Nichiren Shoshu’s Buddhism, its priests and High Priests and their doctrinal subtleties, were expressions of a remote Japanese reality, which barely touched European members. In SG’s publications, in fact, specific references to the Nichiren Shoshu occurred only on the occasion of the traditional New Year address, when the January issue of *Il Nuovo*

Rinascimento would feature a picture of the High Priest Abe Nikken. At the same time, the figure of Nichiren Daishonin, the founder of the doctrine, has been moved from a central position to a peripheral role, in which his teachings are illustrated as functional to the figure of Daisaku Ikeda, who today replaces Nichiren in the role of *il Maestro*, as noted in a commentary on the *gosho* published in a 2006 issue of *Il Nuovo Rinascimento*. The article explicitly declares that, having moved away from the previous Nichiren Shoshu doctrine, “our President Daisaku Ikeda” has to be considered today as the true “votary of the Lotus Sutra”:

Occorre chiarire che il termine “maestro” non si riferisce al maestro della legge di cui tratta il cosiddetto principio di “non dualità di maestro e discepolo” (giapp. *Shitei funi*) come interpretata dalla tradizione precedente. La relazione di maestro e discepolo nel buddismo è un legame da vita a vita basato sulla Legge Mistica e sulla condivisione da parte dei discepoli dello stesso voto del maestro. Il voto del maestro è quello di propagare kosen rufu, La persona che sta lottando per questo scopo oggi è il nostro presidente Daisaku Ikeda (NR 327: 8).

5.3. Linguistic Varieties: Soka Gakkai Adaptive Strategies to the Italian Language

Gaetano Berruto (1987: 20) proposes a classification of the Italian language according to the spoken or written medium of use (diamesic variety). Language expresses divisions based on social differences (diastratic variety), on domain and function (diaphasic variety) and on geographical divisions (diatopic variety). Berruto establishes extreme models of each variety, and places intermediate stages along a continuum. On the diatopic continuum, the highest code is represented by the literary tradition, which adopts Florentine models. The lowest code is the regional variety with features typically used by a speaker of dialect. On the diastratic continuum, at the top

end, one finds the sophisticated language spoken by highly educated groups, while at the lowest end one finds the forms adopted by rural communities and uneducated members of the working classes. On the diaphasic continuum, at the top end there are the formal registers, and at the bottom are illustrations of “Italiano trascurato” (“sloppy” Italian). Along the diamesic continuum that contrasts written use and spoken language, one finds formal written styles at one extreme and extreme unplanned colloquial styles at the other end.

Berruto (1987: 27) further comments that in normal everyday language, a given variety may be placed on any of the four different continuum. For example, a diaphasic variety such as professional jargon is also confined to use by certain social groups, thus becoming part of the diastratic continuum. The diatopic and diastratic varieties are practically indistinguishable as nearly every user is a native speaker of a regional variety (of the diatopic continuum), but only those who achieve high social positions can abandon the lowest levels of the variety and reach the high levels of the standard on the diaphasic continuum. Berruto eventually reduced his typology to only three main continuum:

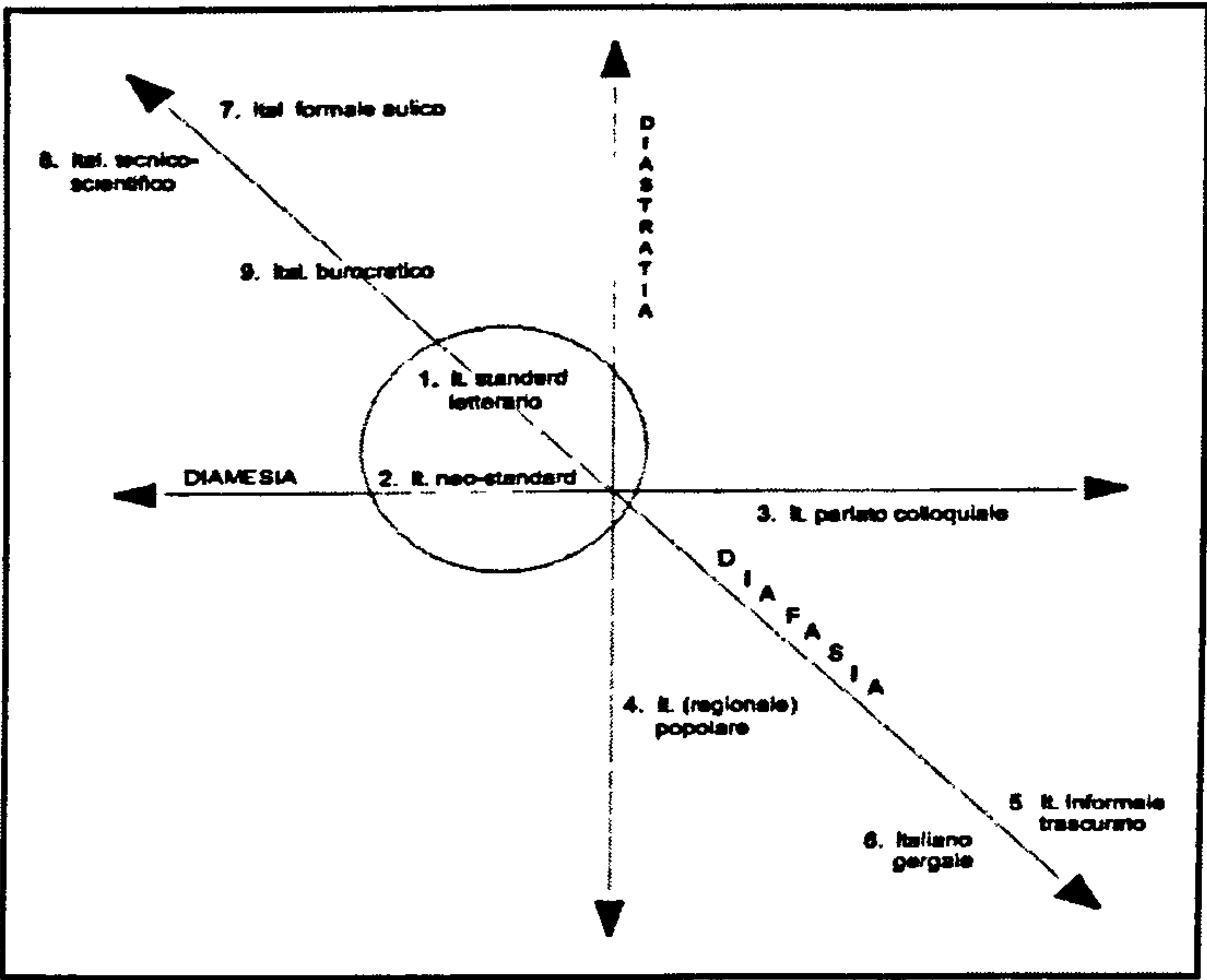


Table b. Berruto 1987 (as simplified in Sobrero 1993: 12)

Variations in Soka Gakkai's language (and translation strategies) can be illustrated by analysing their oscillation between the two poles of written and spoken Italian (i.e. the written language chosen for official publication and the spoken language adopted by group leaders during public speeches) and the function that the convergence of these variations has in the formation of the jargon of Italian Soka Gakkai members.

5.3.1. The Spoken Level

At the spoken level, Soka Gakkai's translation strategy operates at the intralingual level of Italian/Italian. As Migliorini points out (1984: 33), the vocabulary of the Catholic Church is often based on "learned words", i.e. words artificially transplanted from the Greek or Latin lexicon into the language of the Church, which then pass into common speech. These words are generally marked by the fact that they have a doublet, that is, a word popularly developed which runs side by side with the learned lexicon. Examples of doublets are the popular *lettera* vs the learned *epistola*, or the derivative of the Latin *fidere*, which originates the Italian *fede* and *fiducia*. Doublets move along the diafasic axis of the communication, i.e. the virtual line indicating "the function of communication, or the contextual situation in which the communication takes place, and which unites the poles of formal and noble Italian at the one end, and informal Italian on the other end" (Berruto, 1987: 56).

Because Catholic references already occupy the higher position of formal religious vocabulary, the construction of Soka Gakkai's communicative register in Italy purposely moved toward a more informal set of references. Thus, all writings that Nichiren Daishonin addressed to his disciples (*gosho*) are referred to as "le *lettere* di

Nichiren Daishonin”, as opposed to Church vocabulary which commonly uses the term *epistola*; and “faith in the *Gohonzon*” is explained as “*fiducia nel Gohonzon*”. The verb *pregare* is replaced by the construct *recitare una preghiera*, and then, through the elision of the second term, it is reduced to *recitare*.

The actions pertaining to religious practice create a number of neologisms. *Fare gongyo* (to do *gongyo*) and *recitare daimoku* (to chant *daimoku*) create the verbs *gonghiarsi* and *daimukare*. The notion of “erasing one’s bad karma” produces the verb *skarmarsi*, while the Japanese term *onshitsu* (pertaining to the notion of “someone who disrespects other believers”) survives in the adjective “una personalità *onshitzosa*”.

Italian Buddhist colloquial language is further contaminated by false Anglicisms, deriving from the early study material that was circulated in English and then roughly translated into Italian. Thus, “piety” is translated as *pieta* (pity), “to chant” becomes *cantare*, “dedication” becomes *dedicazione*, a word that does not exist in traditional Italian.

5.3.2. The Written Level

At the written level, Soka Gakkai has opted for a highly formal register. Here, I consider “written text” both the translation of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings (the *gosho*) and the language of Soka Gakkai’s publications (*Il Nuovo Rinascimento* and *Buddismo e Società*) which are devoted both to the task of commenting and illustrating Buddhist principles and to give extensive reports of Daisaku Ikeda’s speeches. In general, the translation strategy has been oriented towards the complete foreignisation of Buddhism, in the attempt to remain as close as possible to the original Japanese religious concepts.

As Susan Bassnett (2005) describes:

Foreignisation ensures that a text is self-consciously other, so that the readers can be in no doubt that what they are encountering derives from a completely different system, in short that it contains traces of a foreignness that marks it as distinct from anything produced from within the target culture (121).

In Italy the “otherness” of Buddhist philosophy has been purposely enhanced, to preserve its tenets from contamination with the norms and expectations which Italians associate with their domestic religion.

This is evident in the translation of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings, which the Italian Soka Gakkai translate from the English version under the supervision of a group of Japanese translators which compare the final draft with the Japanese original. In the Italian translation of the *goshō* a close adherence to the Japanese syntactic structure has been maintained, and the Italian rendering of the phrases follows the elliptic and fragmented flow of the original. To evoke a sense of the foreign, a conspicuous number of terms pertaining to Japanese culture are left in Japanese, at the risk of obscuring the sense of the text. The Italian lexicon chosen for the translation is characterised by the use of archaisms that are recognisably poetical, i.e. positioned at the highest level of the diatopic continuum. An example of this is the well known passage of the *goshō* known as *Kyo’o dono gohenji* (WND: 412), in which Nichiren Daishonin declares that the *Gohonzon* scroll to which his disciples pray has to be considered as the embodiment of Nichiren’s own life.⁵

In the English draft the passage is rendered as

⁵ My comments on the translation are based on a personal communication with Maria Cristina Sereni, member of Soka Gakkai’s translator staff who was directly involved in the translation of this specific *goshō*.

I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart.

The early Italian version, first published in 1984, read:

Io, Nichiren, ho iscritto la mia vita in sumi, perciò credi in questo mandala con tutto il tuo cuore.

The choice to maintain the word “sumi”, without adding a reference to “ink” shows an extreme attention to fidelity toward the original Japanese text. It results, however, obscure to an Italian reader. The same attempt at maximum closeness to the original is evident in the choice of the word *mandala* (vs. the English choice of “*Gohonzon*”). In the Japanese text, the object into which Nichiren inscribes his life is *mahori* (*omamori* in modern Japanese), a term which means “protection” and refers in the text to a particular paper scroll intended for healing and personal protection. The Italian translates it as *mandala*, which is certainly accurate in its meaning of “object of symbolic representation” but adds further obscurity to the whole sentence. As the *omamori* is a particular form of *Gohonzon*, the English translation opts for sacrificing accuracy in favour of clarity.

The obscurity surrounding the verb *iscrivere* as used in this context, in place of a more accessible *scrivere*, was considered necessary to enhance the sacral dimension of the action. This choice underlines the extent to which Italian translators were influenced by the assumption that religious discourse must be embedded in symbolic formulae, as in the tradition of Catholicism.⁶ Here, *iscritto* may be considered as both an archaism and as a calque of the English “to inscribe”. In English, the verb preserves its roots in

⁶ On the use of symbolic formulae in Catholic tradition see also: Alberto M. Mioni (1984) “Una lingua per la religione: problemi sociolinguistici”. *Memoria del Sacro e tradizione Orale. Atti del Terzo Colloquio Interdisciplinare del Centro Studi Antoniani*. Padova: Edizioni Il Messaggero (277-92).

the Latin *inscribere*, which refers to the act of “writing words in a book or carving them on an object”. In the absence of a transparent context, however, the sense of the verb in Italian can be confused with its parallel meaning of “registrare persone o beni in un apposito elenco” (corresponding to the English verbs “to enlist”, “to register”). The reader cannot immediately decipher the meaning of the Italian verb, not knowing the meaning of the name to which it is attached (*sumi*).

At the time, Italian translators devoted particular attention to this segment of the *gosho*, pondering different options to convey the meaning of “to inscribe one’s life into something”, a concept which is at the basis of Nichiren Daishonin’s doctrine. One of the options was the use of the verb *incidere* (to carve), the other was the use of the verb *incarnare*, which would certainly underline the religious implication of the act, but was loaded with Christian references.

A later version of the text (1996) clarifies *sumi* with *inchiostro* (ink), replaces *mandala* with *Gohonzon* and uses the more common *scrivere* in place of *iscrivere*. The intention to underline the importance of the action by relating it to a choice of words which could be felt as pertaining to the sphere of the sacred is evident from the choice of the verb *transfondere*, which the *Dizionario Etimologico Battaglia* (1949) defines as associated to “il passaggio di qualità morali”. In the new translation, the passage reads:

Io Nichiren ho iscritto questo Gohonzon in inchiostro di *sumi* transfondendovi la mia anima, perciò credi in esso con tutto il tuo cuore.⁷

A more recent version (2006) appeared at a time when Soka Gakkai’s Buddhism had been solidly implanted in the Italian territory for more than thirty years. In the translator’s opinion, it was no longer necessary to explain the parallel between the

⁷ *Gli Scritti di Nichiren Daishonin*, (1994) vol. 4: 150.

Gohonzon and Nichiren's life, nor was it necessary to underline the sacral implication of the action through the use of the word *anima* (soul). It was therefore possible to go back to the basic structure of the Japanese text:

Io Nichiren ho iscritto la mia vita in inchiostro di sumi, perciò' credi profondamente in esso (NR 348, 2006: 6).

The analysis of the above passage can be taken as an example of Soka Gakkai's translation strategy, which only in recent times has moved away from its strict adherence to the Japanese language. But it can also be considered an example of a more political strategy, which started to be enacted during the second half of the 1990s, when revisions of the *goshō* had been undertaken to render it "more suitable to the modern society" (NR 185, 1997: 5). After the divorce from the Nichiren Shoshu, what was previously known in Italy as *il buddismo di Nichiren* began to be referred to as *il buddismo della Soka Gakkai*. As part of a general restructuring which involves the International Soka Gakkai in general, specific references to the Nichiren Shoshu tradition have been downplayed, and then reappropriated, as Soka Gakkai struggled to construct a self-sufficient identity by promoting its image through a language that carefully balances secular and religious references.

5.4. The "Untranslatability" of Buddhism

In Italy, Soka Gakkai's religious vocabulary is based on a high frequency of Japanese terms which were left untranslated. Table c illustrates how Buddhist words and concepts are represented in four European languages. The data suggest that although each nation has had a profound linguistic response to the arrival of a hitherto

foreign religion, cultures with a religious background that is not Roman Catholic have been able to accommodate via translation a greater number of religious terms within their language, whereas Catholic countries have proved less able to adjust their language to an oriental religion.

<i>Japanese</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Italian</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>German</i>
Gojukai	Gojukai	Gojukai	Ceremonie de reception des precepts	Gohonzon-verleihung
Juzu	Beads	Juzu	Chapelet Bouddique	Kette
Jihi	Compassion	Jihi	Bienveillance Bouddique	---
Zadankai	Discussion meeting	Zadankai	Reunion de discussion	Gruppenversammlung
Shinrai	Guest	Shinrai	Postulant	Anfaenger
Zaimu	Kosen Ruffund	Zaimu	Contribution Financiere	Spende
Butsudan	Shrine	Butsudan	Autel Bouddique	Butsudan
Onshitzu	Slander	Onshitzu	Faire onshitzu	---
Kaikan	Culture Centre	Kaikan	Centre Culturel	Kulturzentrum
Hombu	Headquarters	Hombu	Centre	Hauptstelle
Taiten	Stop practising	Taiten	Arreter la pratique	Aufhoeren-zu-praktizieren

Table c. Adapted from *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (165, 1995)

As these examples demonstrate, English and German have absorbed and translated the quasi-totality of Japanese words. France, culturally resistant to loan words in virtue of its longstanding policy aimed at protecting the purity of its language, has opted for a translation strategy that, while retaining a vocabulary pertaining to Church tradition (*autel; chapelet; bienveillance*) simply adds the adjective “Bouddique” to differentiate them from their Christian usage. In total opposition to these strategies, the Italian language shows the highest number of untranslated words and concepts.

Italian converts acquire their vocabulary from the written level, i.e. from Soka Gakkai's publications, and absorb a high number of technical terms and foreign words, which – in as much as their semantic equivalents are already allocated in the Catholic cultural repertoire – cannot be translated: thus the “altar” and the “beads” remain in the Japanese form *butsudan* and *juzu*, as opposed to *altare* and *rosario*. The Buddhist meeting is referred to as the *zadankai*, or, as an alternative, with the use of the English word as *il meeting*, although in unofficial situations it is sometimes referred to as *andare a Messa*, no doubts because there is a Buddhist “altar” enshrining the object of worship. Similarly, the action of “asking for guidance”, where the Buddhist convert discusses his or her personal difficulties with a senior leader in a private conversation is perceived as similar to the act of Confession, and is unofficially referred to as *andare a confessarsi*.⁸

The cartoon on the next page can be taken as an example of the difficulties encountered by Italian practitioners in the encounter with a “foreign” religion. The cartoon features “Carmen the Candle” and “Vincense the Incense Stick”, two ever-present objects found on every Buddhist's altar. Carmen and Vincense are commenting upon the behaviour and language of Italian practitioners at a *zadankai*. An invisible voice-over begins by urging the attendees to stop employing Japanese terminology. “Italian”, it says, “is a beautiful language, rich in history and tradition. I therefore suggest that we return to our cultural roots and start speaking Italian!”. The assembled practitioners agree and voices their approval by means of the following bursts of enthusiasm:

- “Holy Virgin, that's a very good idea!”
- “It's a miracle!”

⁸ See also Maria Immacolata Macioti's comments on the “religious” relationship between the new converts and their senior leaders (Macioti, 2002a: 45-51).

- “Ohhh! Thanks Heavens!”
- Good God, I can’t believe my ears!”
- “Ah, the Ways of the Lord...”
- “By all Saints in Heaven!”
- “Thanks God! It’s about time!”
- “Jesus, Joseph and Mary, how true!”

The voice-over then reacts to this outpouring of support: “Hmmm, maybe we should wait for better times”. To which Vincense the Incense Stick comments: “Yeah, and God help us!”.

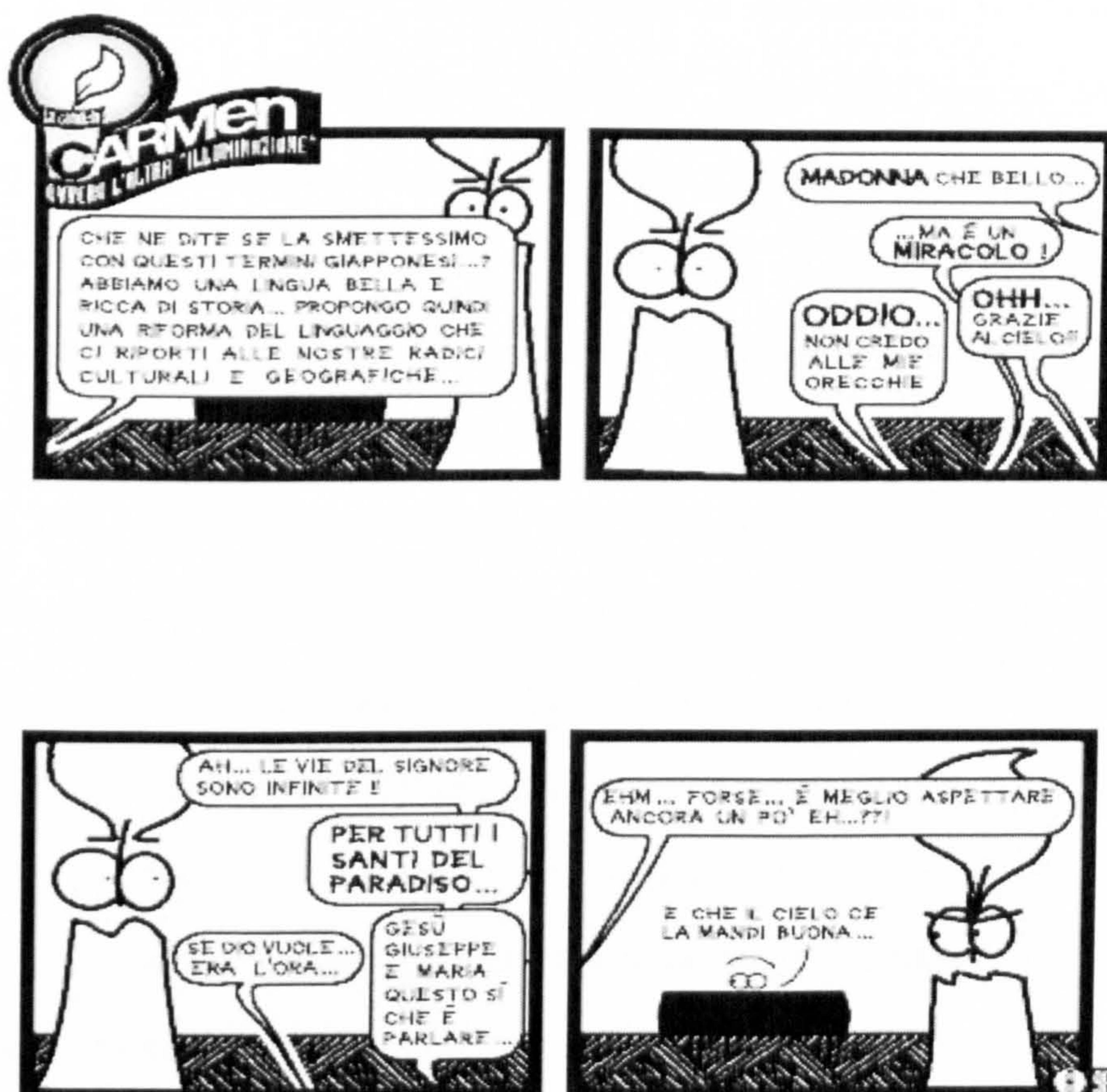


Fig. 4. *Carmen la Candela*, Copyright by Adriano Giannini 2000.

The “Carmen la Candela” cartoon strip was published monthly in *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* from 1999 to 2001. This particular cartoon however, was not published, as the magazine’s board of editors feared that it would offend the sensibilities of Catholic readers, a fact that undoubtedly underlines the overwhelming importance of Catholicism in Italy and the extreme attention of Italian Soka Gakkai to avoid every conflictual relationship with its host environment.

5.5. *Buddese*: the Language of Religious Authority

If the impossibility of finding a functional equivalent of words pertaining to religious vocabulary, such as “altar”, “rosary” or “compassion” may be ascribed to the overwhelming position that Catholicism occupies within the Italian religious repertoire, the non-translation of more generic words such as *zadankai* (meeting), *honbu* (headquarter) or *kaikan* (cultural centre) would seem largely unnecessary, as the Italian vocabulary offers equivalents such as “riunione”, “centro”, and “centro culturale”.

These elements suggest that in Italy SG’s adaptive strategy evolved along the lines of a total Orientalisation of Buddhism. The preservation of Japanese references was perceived as fundamental to distance its religious character from the notion of “religion” already embedded in the native *sensus communis*. A Japanese leadership, a Japanese vocabulary, and a Japanese set of rituals – such as the custom of removing one’s shoes before entering the gathering place and kneeling on the floor during worship – successfully conformed to the formation of Buddhism as a “new” and autonomous religious practice.

The process of foreignisation of Buddhist vocabulary began as a spontaneous and individual phenomenon, in the early days of *shakubuku*, when the new SG's adherents struggled to disseminate among their friends a Japanese philosophy which they themselves could barely understand. The process then developed from the interaction between spoken level and written level, which was filled with Japanese references. In time, the overlapping of elements from both written and spoken language have given rise to a peculiar Italian/Japanese jargon, which is known among Italian members as *Buddese*.

As Sobrero (1993: 87) points out, jargon results from the evolution of "special languages" (It. *sottocodici*, or *lingue speciali*), i.e. varieties that were originally developed by specific professional sectors and are then transferred into everyday speech. As a result, the technical lexicon of the special language makes these varieties seem more prestigious to the general public. At a social level, the use of special languages distinguishes the members of a group, provides a sense of belonging and reinforces personal bonds.

Among Italian Soka Gakkai's members, *Buddese* originated from the interaction of three elements: the perception of Japanese as the official language of Buddhism, the desire to imitate Japanese leaders, and the desire to climb up the hierarchic echelon of the organisation. *Buddese* moves along the diastatic continuum (i.e. the virtual line which considers the social position of speakers, and, in this case, their position in the hierarchical structure of the organisation) from the top end of the pyramidal structure and flows down to the group leaders, from where it is then absorbed by new converts. The jargon is built around an unnecessary use of Japanese words and formulae, which could easily be translated into Italian but which are perceived as fundamental to establishing social visibility within the organisation. Among SG's members, *Buddese* takes the form of a "linguistic capital" (Bourdieu, 1991: 163 ff.) and became a source

for power and status. The analysis of the use of language in a religious organisation, in fact, is important to understand how issues of power, identity and conflict interrelate within it. Language is the key element to “create and shape an organisation, to carve out an internal structure with circumscribed roles, responsibilities and rights for its different members, and for others with whom they interact” (Talbot, Atkinson and Atkinson, 2003: 72).

Many commentators (see in particular the contributions collected in Machacek and Wilson, 2000) have identified the key to the SGI’s successful adaptation to different cultural contexts as its ability to construct indigenous organisations which revolve around a group of native directors. Although preserving the structural elements of the parent organisation, countries such as the United States (Hammond and Machacek 1999), Britain (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994) or Germany (Ionescu, 2000) have, over time, developed various forms of autonomy from Japan, and have gradually replaced the Japanese leadership with native general directors, who have smoothed the way toward the Westernisation of Buddhist practices, helping their members to make a distinction between the core elements of Buddhism and the paraphernalia of Japanese culture attached to it. In some cases, for example in SG-UK, where the first British general director was appointed as early as 1975, the process was perceived as natural, and did not require any particular adjustment (Waterhouse, 1997: 92). In other cases, such as Germany, the transition evolved as a cultural negotiation between Japanese leaders – strongly oriented toward the preservation of things “as they have always done in Japan (...) because they know best” (Ionescu, 2000: 189) and native members who were unwilling to accept uncritically the Japanese leadership. As one German member comments, “at first it was very much a case of ‘hush, you don’t know anything!’”. Everything came from above, like a parent with a child” (Ionescu, *Ibid.*) In Germany, then, the gradual replacement of the Japanese leadership occurred as a fundamental step

in the assimilation of Buddhism as a native practice, i.e. a “German practice for German practitioners” (Ionescu, Ibid.).

In Italy, the perception of Japanese as the official language of Buddhism has been reinforced by the massive presence of a Japanese speaking leadership. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the pyramidal structure of Soka Gakkai has the *Direttore Generale* (Japanese) at its top, who, assisted by a board of *Vice Direttori* (Japanese and Italians), hold monthly general meetings to communicate with the Area leaders. The area leaders then pass the communications on to the lower ranks of *Responsabili*. Italian speakers have learned Buddhism by imitating the modes and the language of their Japanese leaders, many of which are surrounded with the utmost affection – “personality cult”, in Macioti’s words (2002a: 44), and are regarded as an example for every aspect of life. Riccardo Pacci, a member of the organisation since 1970, remembers that in the early times the reverence for “all things Japanese” grew to such an extent that Italian leaders even imitated Mr. Kaneda’s poor understanding of Italian grammar, as well as imitating the way he dressed (NR 372, 2007: 9).

In time, closeness to the Japanese language has come to signify closeness to the person, and by contiguity, to the knowledge embodied by the person. In this light, *Buddese* can be viewed as part of a complex relationship which involves issues of authority, conflict, power and identity, and in which Italian members perceive their roles and identities as subjected to and dependent on their Japanese counterparts. The asymmetrical position of Italians vis-à-vis their Japanese leaders is clearly revealed by the linguistic choices (pronouns and honorific forms) enacted during spoken interactions. For example, Japanese leaders are always addressed with the term *Signor*, or *Signora*, using the third person pronoun *Lei* to signal the importance of the addressee, whereas Italians are addressed with *tu* (both by other Italians and by the Japanese) and are simply called by their first names.

Italian Buddhist identity was thus constructed through the opposition of a series of stereotypical figures. As Macioti (2002a: 47) underlines, in the creation of one’s identity, the presence of the “other” is important in order to have something to distinguish oneself from. This works best if the “other” is not too well known, so that generalisations can be made, and stereotypes can be reinforced. In the case of Soka Gakkai in Italy, this is reflected in the way both the Japanese and the Italians speak of the other ethnic group: “generally the Japanese are.....and Italians are....” (Macioti, Ibid.)

In time, the imitation of “all thing Japanese” grew to such an extent that a entire issue of *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (NR 165, 1995: 8) was devoted to the effort to eradicate *Buddese*. The article urged the members to “stop imitating the *Responsabili*” and provided the Italian translation for a number of Japanese terms:

JAPANESE	ITALIAN
Gojukai	Cerimonia di conversione
Juzu	Rosario buddhista
Jihi	Compassione
Zadankai	Riunione di discussione
Shinrai	Ospite
Zaimu	Offerta
Butsudan	Altare
Onsihtzu	Offesa
Kaikan	Centro Culturale
Hombu	Centro
Taiten	Smettere di praticare
Naitoku	Principiante

Table d. Adapted from *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (165, Nov. 1995)

Further efforts have been made to encourage the use of an Italian vocabulary among Buddhist practitioners, culminating in a new series of articles aptly named *Piccolo Dizionario di "Buddese"*, which *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* publishes every other month since January 2007.

5.6. The Interplay of Foreignisation and Domestication in the Construction of Religious Authority

The use of a high degree of foreignisation, although intended to move converts towards non-Christian practice, helped Italian Soka Gakkai to achieve another fundamental goal, that of developing the only type of language that Italian could recognise as "religious", i.e. a language grounded in "alien words". As Douglas Robinson (1996) explains, alien words are "foreign words that are just domesticated enough to be almost understandable, but still alien enough to be elevated, solemn, sacred, powerful, taboo" (115). Thus, while foreignising their vocabulary, Italian Soka Gakkai leaders created the ground on which to base their institutional authority, a language constructed upon words surrounded by enough obscurity to be felt as pertaining to an otherworldly sphere in virtue of the impression they give to be in contact with a higher level of knowledge, "a higher level associated with the supernatural and borrowing ideological support for that association from a venerated foreign language" (Robinson, *Ibid.*).

In Italy, the use of *Buddese* was strongly discouraged among members, and was appropriated by the hierarchy of *Responsabili*. A parallel can be found here with the strategy of the post-Reformation Catholic Church, whose linguistic choices reinforced the idea of religion as a repository of dogmas, and produced a clericalised organisation

based on the strict division between rulers and subjects through a creation of a sacral language “not understood by people but greatly prized by the learned and the elite” (Noel, 1980: 89). As Noel (Ibid.) points out,

A language which is sacral does not make intelligibility one of its primary objectives. Rather the opposite in fact, It originates in a tendency, observable in human nature from time immemorial, of interposing some sort of filter or protective screen between lowly creature and awesome creator. It adds an artificial air of mystery and even a cabbalistic touch to ordinary devotion and is freely borrowed in the world of magic. It is a language pre-eminently suitable for a priestly caste to employ on behalf of an unquestioning tribe.

The notion of religious authority, or “authority based on religious claims” (Waida, 1987: 2.1), pertains to the group of practices used by an organised religion to preserve and disseminate what it considers to be the truth. One role of organised religions, in fact, is to protect its doctrine and to identify the appropriate way in which to move its converts toward an understanding of that truth. In order to do this, there must be a recognition that while truth or knowledge may be there to be accessed, they must be made available through certain recognised, and approved, practices. Authority, considered as a legitimate power to require and receive obedience, may be vested in one or more elements of a religious movement: the religious community and its leaders or founders; the sacred writings or oral teachings recognised by that community which explains its doctrines and practices; the tradition or lineage through which the texts or oral instructions have been handed down; and the personal experience of believers and practitioners. Individuals may choose whether to accept religious propositions as true. In doing so, they also decide whether to accept or reject the vehicle for those truths. In other words, authority has to be recognised as well as claimed. For this reason, religious truths must be presented in a way which is accessible. D.E. Trueblood (1942: 67) argues

that one reason to rely on a religious authority is “in order to gain specialist information”. Thus, in order to become authoritative a religion must be accessible. It must be represented in forms that the converts can understand, and this is achieved through accommodation with cultural conventions with which they are familiar.

As Sonda Ionescu (2000) points out, Soka Gakkai is a “client oriented” organisation, which acts as “a cultural broker, managing a flow of meaning between different socio-religious contexts” (190). In order to firmly establish its presence in the religious marketplace, Soka Gakkai has had to make its “specialist information” available in a form that could appeal to the specific cultural repertoire of a country. To do so, it has to be carefully aware of the pre-existing religious traditions of the host environment, and adapted its “form” and “contents” in accordance with it.

For the dissemination of its religious authority in Italy Soka Gakkai has modelled its form and contents on the tradition of Roman Catholicism. Following the tradition of the Catholic Church, whose authority is based on – and justified by – Latin references and a body of specialized knowledge of which theologians and priests are the sole *depositum custodii* (Tondelli, 1949: 408), Soka Gakkai’s leaders in Italy simply renamed domestic religious elements: where the Church had the priest at the altar, Soka Gakkai now has the *Responsabile*, who is in charge of guiding converts in the difficult journey towards the comprehension of the new faith. Italian Soka Gakkai, in fact, revolves around the figure of the *Responsabile* – from the local group leader to the senior leaders at the upper level of the hierarchical structure – as the sole guardian of faith, upon whom the believers have to refer to learn the correct interpretation of the Buddhist tenets. Similarly, the sacred Scriptures have been replaced by the *gosho*, and secondary sources for the catechesis are Ikeda’s writings. Thus, the foreignisation of its language allowed Soka Gakkai to actually domesticate its practices on the blueprint of

the Roman Catholic Church, the only source of religious authority that Italians were ready to recognise.

The peculiarity of Soka Gakkai's adaptive strategies in Italy can be highlighted by a comparison with SGI's adaptation in a country with a non-Catholic background such as Britain, where it is possible to argue that the nation's Protestant heritage eased the accommodation of Soka Gakkai as a "religion". At the base of Protestantism there is a faith in equivalencies. Protestantism evolved from the assumption of the translatability of Christianity. Not only could God's language (the Bible) be effectively translated into a variety of tongues, thus allowing human beings to directly confront it and to elaborate on it without any intermediation, but Christianity could also be translated into a variety of Churches and denominations, each of them equally worth legitimisation by faith, each of them equally legitimate in the sharing of the same vocabulary. One of the consequences of the Reformation, in fact, is that words such as "religion" or "faith" acquired a universal character, and cannot be considered as pertaining to a specific religious institution.

In his study of SGI's adaptation in Britain, Bryan Wilson (2000) remarks that British people converted to the new religion *despite* its exotic character. In Wilson's analysis, British converts were not willing to accept a religion which demanded conformity to any narrowly conceived code of specific rules, nor were they interested in other forms of Buddhism grounded in traditions that are "no less ascetic than traditional Christianity" (353). Soka Gakkai was successful in Britain because it quickly adapted to the features of a country which felt no need to embrace a religion based in a remote country, which was endowed with traditions and procedures entirely unlike those of any Western tradition, and the practice of which required the acquisition of unfamiliar concepts and an unfamiliar language. Wilson points out that:

The Lotus sutra [...] is not in itself an immediately accessible text for Westerners; the practice of chanting is distinctly exotic; and the *Gohonzon* is in itself an entirely unfamiliar object of worship. None of these fundamental features of the Buddhism propounded by Nichiren was in itself likely to be the primary source of attraction for British converts. The soteriology of this new faith, the moral economy it expounded and the ethos it engendered were much more likely to capture the imagination of prospective members. Even the person of Nichiren [...] was not projected as a compelling personal agent of salvation. In essence, the faith reposed in a much more abstract and philosophical conception of the prospects for human well-being. Rather than formal doctrine or practical liturgy, it was the ethic of Soka Gakkai Buddhism with which British converts initially found resonance (354).

Wilson underlines how Protestant soteriology (i.e. the question of personal salvation) played a major role in influencing the reception of Soka Gakkai in the UK. Although his emphasis on Protestantism may seem to underestimate the ethnic and religious variety which characterise and shape the British religious repertoire, it seems nevertheless correct to assume that when Soka Gakkai appeared in Britain in the early 1960s the country was influenced by the wide framework of Christian ethics, a religious ethos which still influences society far beyond the confines of the Church, and is largely responsible for patterns of self-discipline, social order and civic commitment. Christianity in the form of Protestantism, Wilson maintains, “promoted rational conduct and rationalised social institutions, eliminating superstition and promoting scientific advantage” (350). The Protestant ethic of self restraint, however, had started to be challenged by the emerging consumer society, which stimulated people to exercise choice and legitimize their desire for enjoyment and gratification. Into such a situation,

Soka Gakkai represented a different type of moral tradition, positing a new balance between restraint and reward, and offering “ a different logic for the relationship between personal comportment and personal gratification” (354). Thus, what British converts were seeking in Soka Gakkai’s religion was an ethical teaching which could be flexible and adaptable to individual circumstances.

At the early stage of its dissemination in Italy, Soka Gakkai seemed to move along the same lines. Indeed, many future adherents of SG, when asked to recall their first encounter with its practices, have stated that they were initially attracted by the interplay between spiritual and material benefits on offer to them. They prayed for “benefits” and they continued to pray because “it worked”. As one member declared: “Our religion is the only one that, together with theoretical proof and documentary proof, also offers a concrete and tangible proof” (reported in Macioti, 1996: 53).

Indeed, as Barone (2005) stresses, the basis of SG’s recruitment strategies today remains highly utilitarian. In his messages to believers, Ikeda often exhorts SG members to be successful in their lives, since success constitutes the best possible demonstration of the validity of this brand of Buddhism. In accordance with this emphasis, SG members are expected to prepare detailed lists of wishes and goals at the beginning of the year and are traditionally invited to make a detailed evaluation of what they have obtained at the last meeting of the year. This “benefits enumeration” is counterbalanced by what believers themselves are able to do to achieve their aims by way of prayer. For example, believers often keep track of how long they pray each day on a poster specifically designed for this purpose (*conta-daimoku*) in which 20 minutes of chanting corresponds to 1,000 points. The poster contains a figure divided into 1,000 squares, and the believer will mark a square when he or she has reached 1,000 points. The realisation of a particular wish is thought to occur when the member obtains one million points (Ibid.).

The emphasis on benefits, however, does not seem to be the only reason for the success of the movement. To sustain a lasting commitment, other kinds of motivation must gradually come into play. According to the testimonials collected by Macioti (1996: 78), a principal reason for SG's appeal lies in its interactional dynamics which creates a sense of common belonging and a diffused solidarity between members. To quote from the testimonials:

At the beginning it was just like therapy. I had to solve my problems. But now I don't care about benefits. I pray because I like it!

And:

You fell in love with Soka even before you realize how the practice works. You feel part of a revolution against everybody. And when you go to the meeting for the first time you feel a magic atmosphere, and that moment is the driving force of everything, of your faith, of the voluntary activities, of your prayers.

In his *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Randall Collins (2004) describes how interaction rituals and shared beliefs can generate symbolic incentives to participate in the activities of a religious movement. An interaction ritual has four initiating conditions:

- The physical co-presence of two or more people assembled in the same place.
- The barriers to outsiders that provide participants with a sense of who is taking part in the ritual and who is excluded.
- A common focus upon the same object.
- A shared emotional mood.

Collins stresses how these elements, and, in particular the shared focus of attention and the emotional tone, feed upon and reinforce each other:

As the person becomes more tightly focussed on their common activity, more aware of what each other is doing and feeling, and more aware of each other's awareness, they experience their shared emotions more intensely, as it comes to dominate their awareness (48).

In other words, a common set of focused emotions and attentions stimulates collective effervescence and enhances the sense of mutual participation. This ritual dynamic produces a number of important outcomes, such as the sense of belonging to a group, the embrace of symbols that represent the group, and a feeling of morality: the sense of rightness in adhering to the group and respecting its symbols (Ibid.).

According to Collins' theory, then, membership of a religious movement can be described as the experience of participating in a sequence of nested interaction rituals. In the case of Soka Gakkai, its collective activities include the by-weekly meetings in small discussion groups, the study meetings, the *Gojukai* ceremony, and, less regularly, public events such as exhibitions, music festivals and other cultural manifestations. Another powerful generator of emotional energy is the veneration that surrounds President Ikeda. This collective feeling is encouraged by Soka Gakkai's magazines, which regularly publish Ikeda's speeches and poems, and excerpts from books that he often publishes together with famous philosophers, scientists and politicians. The magazines inform members of the awards and honorary doctorates that he continuously receives, of his meetings with political leaders from important countries, and of the opening ceremonies of institutes, foundations, and universities that Ikeda has sponsored. These rituals, in turn, become the topic of conversational rituals between members who, by sharing and reciprocally communicating their admiration for Ikeda, vigorously reinforce their sense of belonging to an important movement that works for noble ideals.

These observations seem to suggest that, in contrast to the British case, Soka Gakkai's major source of appeal for Italian converts lies in its ritual dimension, in its "religious" character and in the strength in which it emphasises collective participation to its activities.

5.7. *Itai Doshin Shitei Funi* and *Sensei*: a Foreign Vocabulary for Domestic Propaganda

Following the 1998 official recognition of Soka Gakkai as a "Ente Religioso", and the establishment of the Istituto Buddista Italiano, Soka Gakkai sought to emphasise the centrality of its religious dimension and authority by setting up a board known as the *Ministri di Culto*, which was created by the expedient of simply renaming its hierarchy of senior leaders. Thus, SG's Italian adherents, who, up until that moment had belonged to a lay organisation, were now asked to consider themselves the *fedeli* of a religion, and, as a corollary of this change in the SG's status, their former peer *Responsabili* were now endowed with the sacral status of Ministers of Religion. As such they would receive a salary from the Institute and would be invested with the new prerogative of celebrating marriages and funerals, and of advising believers in matters of faith and doctrine.

To solidify its new identity as a "religion proper", Soka Gakkai codified its doctrine through the reappropriation of Nichiren Shoshu's theoretical principles of *itai doshin* and *shitei funi* (this last in strict correlation with the word *sensei*). These concepts were conveyed to SG's members through a careful balance of domestication and foreignisation. On their entrance into the organisation, new members receive a *Dizionario dei Termini del Buddismo della Soka Gakkai* (DTB, 1984) a booklet

intended for internal circulation which provides a long and accurate explanation of the Japanese ideograms, with excerpts from the *goshō* to illustrate how these expressions were used in Nichiren Daishonin's time. The *Dizionario* then provides an explanation on how the same terms have to be understood today, in the light of Soka Gakkai interpretation of Buddhism. Thus, Italian converts learn that the compound *itai doshin* means "of different bodies but one in mind", whereas *dotai ishin* means "of one body yet of different minds". By being made familiar with the sources of such concepts, converts are able to trace the term *itai doshin* back to three Nichiren's *goshō*, namely "The True Entity of Life", "On Itai Doshin", and "The Heritage of the Ultimate Matter of Life and Death". In the latter, Nichiren expounded that:

All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in itai doshin, transcending all differences between themselves and disregarding all extraneous matter to become as close as fish and the water in which they swim (WND: 514).

In the *goshō* "On Itai Doshin", the concept is illustrated through a military metaphor:

If itai doshin prevails, the people will achieve their goal. However, in dotai ishin they can achieve nothing remarkable. The over three thousands volumes of Confucian and Taoist literature are filled with examples. King Chou of Yin led 700,000 soldiers into the battle, fighting against King Wu of Chou and his 800 men. But King Chou army lost because of disunity. King Wu's army defeated him because of perfect unity. (...) Though numerous, the Japanese will find it difficult to accomplish anything. This is because they are divided in spirit. In contrast, I believe that even though Nichiren and his followers are few in number, because they are acting in itai doshin, they will accomplish their great mission of propagating the Lotus Sutra (WND: 1389).

In “The True Entity of Life”, Nichiren teaches that:

Always maintain your faith as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and forever exert yourself as a disciple of Nichiren. If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, then you must be a Bodhisatva of the Earth (WND: 666).

Through their participation in study meetings, converts are gradually instructed on the importance of being “a disciple”, and of acting with “the same mind as” one, in order to become “as close as fish in the water in which they swim”.

The concept of *itai doshin* is strictly related to the concept of *shitei funi* (expressing the oneness of master and disciple) and *sensei* (the master). As Takie Lebra (1976) underlines, Japanese culture revolves around a variety of commonly used idiomatic phrases expressing “dependency on patronage”, the type of dependence found in the relationship between employer and employee, chief and subordinate, leader and follower, teacher and disciple (51). These types of dependency occur most often as a quasi-familial relationship, where the dependent partner assumes the role of a child toward the supporting partner, who assumes the role of a parent. The term *shitei funi* refers to the respect that a Buddhist disciple must show for his or her *sensei*. The Japanese words *sensei* or *shisho*, which can be translated into English as “teacher” or “master” are very commonly used in Japan, as the concepts of honouring, respect and dignity which these words express are a fundamental part of Japanese cultural behaviour. Thus, the word *sensei* is mainly used when referring to school teachers, doctors or accomplished persons in virtually any field. Italian Soka Gakkai explains the concept as “una persona che ha raggiunto una profonda conoscenza di qualcosa, e deve essere seguito come esempio” (DTB, 1984: 7). In Nichiren Shoshu tradition, *sensei* refers to the founder of the doctrine, Nichiren Daishonin. In Italy however, the term

functions as a synonym for Daisaku Ikeda, and appears in tautological constructions such as “Sensei è il mio Maestro” (my master is my master).⁹

Shisho is a more formal version of *sensei*, and is used mainly in the realms of the arts or religion. *Funi* is an abbreviation of *nin funi*, meaning “two and yet not two”. With the *shi* of *shisho*, the term forms the compound *shitei funi*, or “the oneness of master and disciple”.

Sensei and *shitei funi* are culturally specific concepts and no equivalent to them exists in any kind of personal relationship in Western culture. Thus, the use of such a sensitive terminology could lead to a certain degree of misunderstanding and should be accompanied by a careful explanation to eliminate any negative connotations, such as “control, possession, blind allegiance”. In Italy, however, these terms have entered the vocabulary of Buddhists, and are largely used by leaders at meetings, to build sentences such as “*kosen rufu* will be achieved only if we are in *itai doshin* with *sensei*, if you do not create *shitei funi* within yourselves you are acting as an *akuchishiki*”.¹⁰

In such cases, Buddhists take the form of what Umberto Eco (1976) defines as “sopraffazione verbale”, that is, the purposeful use of jargon to overwhelm the listener:

un discorso che ha tutte le apparenze della scientificità e quindi dell'autorevolezza. Ma il cui unico fine è di impedire all'uditorio di capire quello che viene detto. Questo tipo di discorso può essere usato sia perché chi parla sa cosa vuol dire ma vuol farlo sapere solo a pochi, sia anche perché chi parla non sa cosa vuol dire e maschera il proprio smarrimento sotto l'accumulazione retorica (96).

⁹ At the written level, Soka Gakkai publications today tend to translate the word *sensei* and refer to Ikeda as “il Maestro”. However, the term *sensei* is commonly used during spoken interaction, and is widely used in blogs and websites. See for example: <www.sokarinnovamento.it>; and <<http://fiorediloto.splinder.com> ; or <http://marinaremi.blogspot.com/2006/11/ho-un-maestro.html> >

¹⁰ In the Lotus Sutra, the term *akuchishiki* refers to all human beings who deny the possibility of personal enlightenment. In SG's parlance the term is made to identify “the enemies of Buddhism”.

Eco identifies the use of special languages as a strategy aimed at various degrees of political or social manipulation both in the case in which the speaker “knows exactly what he means”, but wants to cloud its speech with obscure references, or in the case in which the speaker simply aims at reinforcing or enhancing his status through the repetition of slogans and generic formulae.

As Macioti (2002a) notes, the *Responsabili* have always been an overwhelming presence in the life of Italian Soka Gakkai, an organisation where “the decisions are made from above, on the basis of criteria that remain mysterious and unclear to the members” (48). Theoretically, SG encourages its member to think of their leader as a kind of “older brother or sister” (NR 126, 1992: 3) from whom one can expect help and encouragement toward developing a correct understanding of Buddhist teachings and building a consistent practice. However, the distinction between bringing comfort in faith and a full scale encroachment into someone’s personal life can be tenuous, and leaders tend to see themselves as protagonists in every situation, thus interpreting the Buddhist teachings according to incorrect parameters, or giving unsolicited advice.

The testimonials collected by Macioti (2002a: 48) have stressed the theme of “authoritarian leadership” in Italian Soka Gakkai. Specifically, SG’s adherents often perceive a strong separation between “important leaders” and “general members”, and the *Responsabili* are often considered to be “stagnating and self-serving”. Furthermore, she adds that “it can happen that someone may interpret the leader’s role as tied to the idea of ‘service’ in the military sense, i.e. as a function of power, and act on misinterpretation, thus provoking reaction of perplexity and aversion” (Ibid.) .

The next cartoon can be taken as an example of SG’s members’ opinion about their leaders. The text reads:

CARMEN: “Sniff Sniff”.....”Vincense? What brand of perfume are you wearing?”

VINCENSE: “Uh? My usual...”

CARMEN: “What is this piercing smell, then?”

VOICE OVER (THE GROUP LEADER): “ Ah! Ah! Ah!.....And from now onwards, I’ll be the one and the only to lead the Gongyo prayer in this group. And I’ll lead it every time, And I’ll lead it every day, including festivities and special occasions ... !”

CARMEN: “Ah, now I see... It’s ‘ARROGANCE’...”

VINCENSE: “ But... didn’t he use to buy ‘EGOIST’ ?”

CARMEN: “Yes... but then he has been promoted to *Responsabile*...”

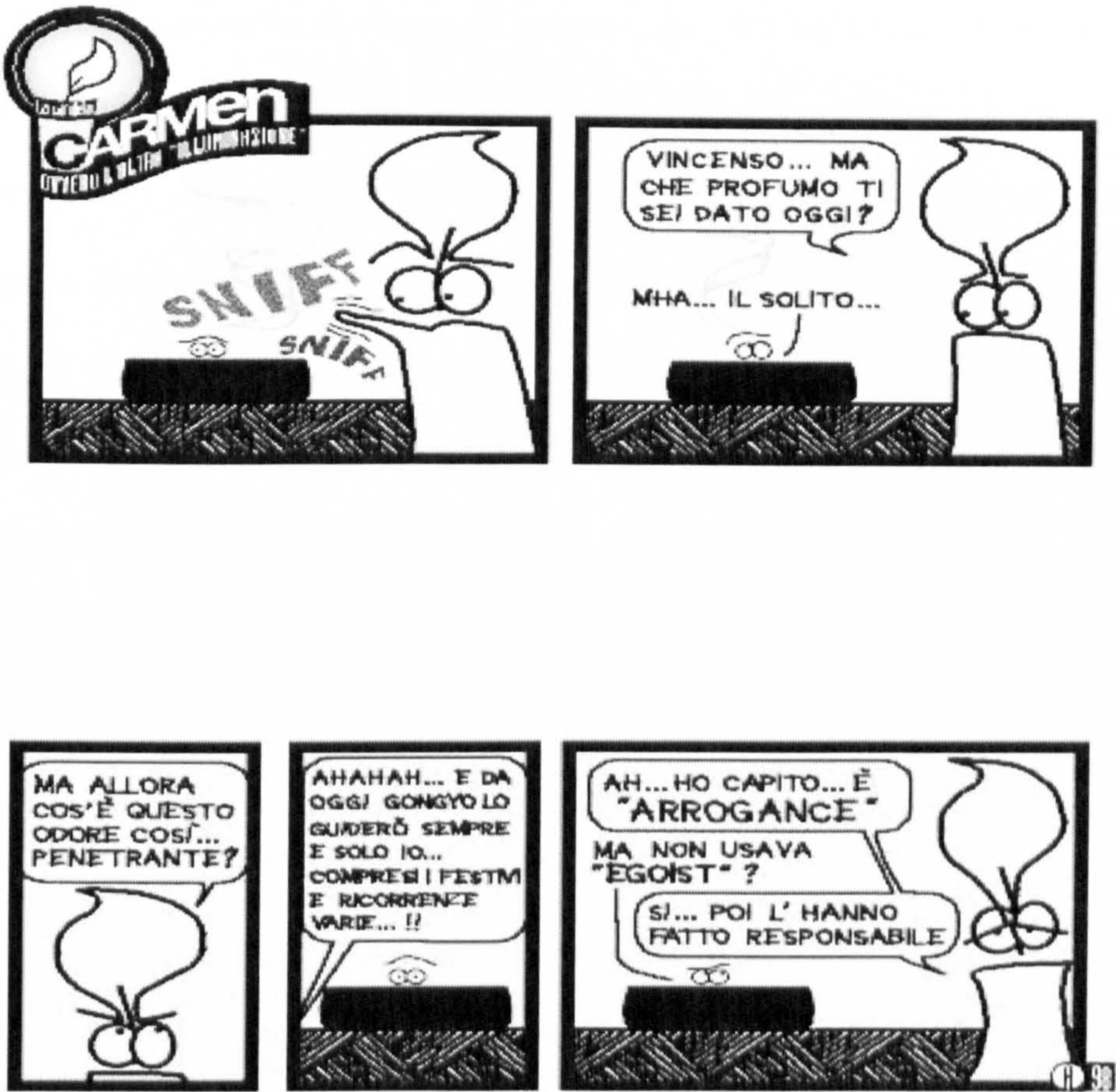


Fig. 5. *Carmen la Candela*. Copyright by Adriano Giannini 2000.

Macioti's first observations on Italian Soka Gakkai's leadership relied upon data from a 1996 study. However in a more recent article published in *La Critica Sociologica* (2002b), she notes how the authoritarian features of SG have increased, once the role of the *Responsabili* assumed a "religious" value, as a result of the legal recognition of the Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai as a *religione*. In the article, Macioti reports how the Soka Gakkai, a pioneer of the defence of human rights, was systematically violating these same rights inside of its own organisation. A case in point was the internal crisis at the IBISG which began in 1999 and which led some 3,000 members to withdraw from the organisation¹¹, many of whom ended up filing complaints against the SG with the police.¹²

In 1999, owing to the legal recognition that SG had received, the new Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai was able to begin the legal procedure necessary to obtain the *Intesa*, the Concordat with the Italian State which allows all officially recognised religions to claim the monetary benefits that stem from the Otto per Mille, the 0.08% percent on the total amount of tax revenue. In order to obtain the *Intesa*, the new religion has to fulfil the requirements prescribed by Italian law to the effect that it has a sizable number of adherents and has proved itself to be financially sound. And, above all, it is important that its members demonstrate "proper" social behaviour in order to acquire a certain level of public respectability. In addition to this, the law prescribes that the Director must be an Italian citizen. Thus, the organisation was forced to erect a

¹¹ The numbers are not official and refer to data collected by "Soka Addio", a mailing list founded by a group of ex members (http://it.groups.yahoo.com/group/soka_addio/). In a 2002 paper presented at the University of Florence sociologist Maria Immacolata Macioti reports a loss of 10,000 members (see <<http://www.scmc.it/forumERM/docs/pdf/15.RelazioneMIMacioti.pdf>>). On the other hand, when questioned over the phone in July 2005, IBISG's Public Relations Office admitted a loss of 650 members and declared that the IBISG was still growing in number, with a total of 33,000 members.

¹² The accusations went back and forth, with members suing IBISG for abusive behaviour, and IBISG suing members (and threatening to sue sociologists and journalists reporting on the case) for libel and defamation. See Macioti, 2002c at: <<http://www.scmc.it/forumERM/docs/pdf/15.RelazioneMIMacioti.pdf>>

more Italian façade, and for the first time an Italian was appointed as Vice General Director, replacing the traditional Japanese leadership (although the former Japanese director, Mitsuhiro Kaneda, remained in charge as “honorary Director”). Beginning in April 2000, all of the editorials published in *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* were signed by Giovanni Littera, a figure unknown by most IBISG members until he was appointed as Vice Director. With *il Signor* Littera – as he wanted to be addressed following the tradition of the honorific appellation accorded in Italy to the Japanese leaders – the magazine’s editorials exhibit a dramatic mutation in style, vocabulary and discourse. The new guidelines revolve around the keyword *severità*, and are built upon a rhetoric that celebrates the religious virtues of obedience and submission.

Thus, for example, the July 2000 issue of *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (221: 3) opens with an editorial on the figure of Ikeda, SG’s *sensei* who has inherited the mystical Laws of Buddhism. In virtue of his “supreme wisdom” (“*saggezza superiore*”), his words and wishes have to be followed without hesitation. SG’s members are encouraged to deepen their *shitei funi* (the relationship with the master):

Spesso la relazione con il maestro ci richiede di agire prima ancora di avere capito perché il maestro ci chiede una determinata cosa. Questo perché non possediamo la saggezza superiore e l’esperienza del maestro e possiamo acquisirle solo seguendo la sua guida e, tramite l’azione, arrivare a capire.¹³

To question the words of the Master is viewed as a clear sign of lack of faith, as the members must “act before understanding” (“*agire prima di capire*”). To doubt the Master is a sign of *akuchishiki*, the devilish functions of life. *Akuchishiki*, the editorial

¹³ “Quite often, the relationship we have with the master requires us to act before we have fully understood why the master is asking us to do something. This is because we do not yet possess the master’s superior wisdom and experience and because we can acquire these things only by accepting his guidance and by engaging in action to arrive at understanding”.

explains, take the form of “false friends” (“cattivi amici”), in opposition to *zenchishiki*, “good friends” (“buoni amici”). The opposition between false friends and good friends is relied upon to first introduce the organization’s new guidelines to members. Members who do not follow directives have a “crooked faith” (“fede distorta”) that needs to be “straightened out” (“raddrizzata”). False friends thus are all these *Responsabili* who, instead of denouncing the crooked faith of their members to a senior leader, try to “cover up” the problem. By showing an “apparent benevolence”, these *Responsabili* are creating their own “clan” within the organisation and, with their “crooked ideas” are “interrupting the pure flow of the Master’s teaching”:

invece di indirizzarlo da un responsabile più anziano ed esperto che potrebbe dargli dei buoni consigli – anche se magari severi – lo “coprono” nascondendo il problema. I più arroganti tendono – all’interno della comunità dei credenti – a creare delle sorte di “clan” dove, magari con apparente benevolenza, trasmettono ai più giovani nella fede le proprie opinioni distorte impedendo che il puro flusso dell’insegnamento del maestro giunga fino a loro.¹⁴

Good friends, on the other hand, are those *Responsabili* who guide their members to ensure that they only develop a “healthy faith” and who denounce the “errors” these members may make to senior leaders. Within the organisation, in fact, the role of senior leaders is that of an indispensable bridge (“un ponte”) between common members and the *Gohonzon*. Senior leaders must be strict, to preserve “the purest flow of the Law”:

¹⁴ “(...) in lieu of sending them to an older and wiser *Responsabile* who might be able to give them good— even though severe — advice— they “shield” and hide the problem. The most arrogant –inside the community of believers—are those who tend to create a kind of “clan” to which, perhaps in a well-meaning way, they convey their own distorted opinions to the most young of the faithful, thereby preventing the pure flux of the senior leader’s teaching to flow all the way to them”.

Poi ci sono i “buoni amici”, che al contrario sono quelli che ci permettono di crescere, che quando è necessario ci aiutano a correggere il nostro atteggiamento e, all’occorrenza, ci indirizzano verso chi è in grado di farlo meglio di loro.

Quelli, in poche parole, che si sforzano di creare un ponte fra noi e il Gohonzon, fra noi e il Daishonin, fra noi e la Soka Gakkai, permettendo che la Legge – che, non dimentichiamolo, di per sé è severa – venga trasmessa ai fedeli nel modo più puro.¹⁵

SG’s members are compared to handicapped children, whose loving parents (the senior leaders) struggle for a cure before their imperfection became irreversible:

E più passa il tempo, più difficile diventa correggere I difetti. Quando un bambino nasce con un difetto fisico, è naturale che i genitori si preoccupino di farlo curare il prima possibile per permettergli di vivere una vita normale ed evitargli delle sofferenze molto più gravi in futuro, quando oltre tutto il difetto potrebbe essere ormai diventato irrecuperabile.¹⁶

President Toda himself, the editorial recalls, always treated his disciple Ikeda with strict discipline. Although knowing that the young Ikeda was threatened by tuberculosis, Toda always manifested his love for him by choosing the most difficult tasks for him to achieve, such as that of spreading *kosen rufu* in the Kansai region of Japan, in order for Ikeda to grow a healthy faith:

¹⁵ “Then, on the other hand, there are “good friends” who allow us to grow, who help us to correct our attitude when necessary, and who direct us, on occasion, to those who are able to do this better than they themselves are. They are, to put it simply, those who strive to create a bridge between us and the Gohonzon, between us and the Daishonin, between us and the Soka Gakkai, thus allowing the Law—which, let us never forget, is in itself severe—to be transmitted in the most pure way to the faithful”.

¹⁶ “And the more time that passes, the more difficult it becomes to cure defects. When a child is born with a physical defect, it is natural that its parents should strive to have it healed as early as possible in order to allow it to live a normal live and to keep it from having to suffer much more seriously in the future, when, with some point having been reached, the defect may have become uncorrectable”.

Dobbiamo pensare che Toda non amasse il suo discepolo Daisaku Ikeda? Questi soffriva di tubercolosi, era debole e febbricitante, eppure Toda non ha mai pensato “poverino, come farà”, anzi gli ha sempre affidato i compiti più difficili come per esempio andare a risollevare l’organizzazione della Soka Gakkai nell’area del Kansai. E fu sempre estremamente severo con lui affinché crescesse “sano” nella fede.¹⁷

Such discipline allowed Ikeda, SGI’s master, to understand that the devilish function of life must be contrasted with firmness and sacrifice. It is thanks to Ikeda’s efforts to defeat the High Priest Nikken, in fact, that its members are all now safe from heresy and empowered to reach happiness. Thus, from his lesson, Italian Soka Gakkai members are asked to learn that a leader must educate his disciples with *severità*:

La realtà della vita è severa, il male è severo, e se il nostro maestro, il presidente Ikeda, non fosse stato educato con severità non sarebbe stato in grado di affrontare e sconfiggere il male che Nikken rappresenta proteggendo tutti i suoi discepoli e, allo stesso tempo, la purezza del Buddismo. Se fosse stato meno severo contro il male, l’eresia propugnata da Nikken avrebbe avuto successo e noi avremmo perso la possibilità di essere felici.¹⁸

The task of Buddhist leaders is then to fight to perfect themselves with discipline, and to propagate the correct faith, even at the cost of being severe when deemed necessary:

¹⁷ “Should we think that Toda didn’t love his disciple Daisaku Ikeda? The latter suffered from tuberculosis, he was weak and feverish, and yet Toda never once thought “the poor fellow, what will he do,” on the contrary, he always set the most difficult tasks for him to accomplish, for example by going to strengthen the Koka Gakkai’s organization in the region of Kansai. And he was always extremely severe with him in order that he would grow up “healthy” in the faith”.

¹⁸ “Life’s reality is severity, evil is severe and if our master, President Ikeda, had not been educated with severity he would never have been able to face and to defeat the evil that Nikken represented thereby protecting all of his disciples and, at the same time, Buddhism’s purity. If he had been less severe against evil, the heresy that Nikken propounded would have been successful and we would have lost the possibility of being happy”.

Facciamo ogni giorno un passo avanti nella nostra lotta per perfezionare la noi stessi, certi che la Legge Buddista che il nostro maestro ci insegna è l'unico mezzo per portare la felicità ad ogni singola persona, e soprattutto impariamo a trasmetterla senza “ritocchi” personali, anche quando è necessario essere severi.¹⁹

The claim that the Buddhist Law has to be preserved and propagated without *ritocchi personali* (personal interpretations) is an invitation to blind faith, and the stress on the importance of being *severi* anticipated the wave of political purges that would devastate the organisation in the course the following months.

Macioti (2002c) describes the new regime as built on a policy of intimidation and threats, where dissidents were readily judged and expelled, to be replaced by people more faithful to the leadership.²⁰ She also provides detailed information about a website (*Tracce2*) opened by a group of former senior members to denounce episodes of violence and slander directed against “thought crimes”, and to give voice to those (mostly homosexuals and the handicapped) who felt that they had been discriminated against on the basis that their presence was deemed unsuitable to the movement’s new canons (Macioti, 2002b: 89-96).

According to the testimonials collected in *Tracce2*, the new leadership organised in 1999 a series of meetings in all Italian major cities to launch slogans such as “Fede, Disciplina, Lotta”, and “Trentamila nel Duemila”. The goal of IBISG in fact, was to

¹⁹ “Let us, each day, take one step forward in our fight to perfect ourselves, certain that the Buddhist Law that our master teaches us is the only way to carry happiness to each single person and, above all, let us learn to transmit it without personal “interpretations”, even when it is necessary to be severe”.

²⁰ Macioti (2002c) describes in detail what she calls “the Montecatini Purge”, a general meeting held in August 2000 in the Tuscan town of Montecatini where the names of all the “enemies” opposing the regime were publicly exposed and denounced. Her article “Tentazioni di Potere all’Interno di un Nuovo Movimento Religioso. Il caso Soka Gakkai in Italia” was presented at the conference “Religioni d’Italia. Fedi e Forme di Spiritualità in un’epoca di Pluralismo” organised by the AIS (Associazione Italiana Sociologia) at the University of Florence (30 November 2002). The article can be accessed at <<http://www.scmc.it/forumERM/docs/pdf/15.relazioneMIMacioti.pdf>>

increase its membership from the 20,000 members registered in 1998 to 30,000 members by the end of the year 2000. Toward this goal, guests attending a *zadankai* had to be “hooked up” (“ricuccati”) by every possible means. After their second visit to a meeting, in fact, *shinrai* (guests) were able to be registered as *naitoku* (beginners) and could be used for statistical purposes.²¹

Macioti (2002c) compares the style to that of Fascist Party Bulletins in that they contain rigid directives that the members are to follow without question. The rhetoric displayed also traces of Fascist propaganda in that it mixed auto-celebration and prescriptions and was supported by doctrinal references that were both confused and confusing. Moreover, the vocabulary is filled with terms never used before, such as “traditore” and “nemico” (referred to the dissidents) and displays a sinister use of military jargon (discipline, heroism, glory) and Christian references (martyrdom, agony, torment), including a reference to Luke’s gospel “whoever is not with me is against me” (Luke 11, 14-23), already employed by Mussolini.²² Also Soka Gakkai’s slogan *Fede, Disciplina, Lotta* is evocative of the catch-phrase *Credere, Obbedire, Combattere* coined by Mussolini in 1939, where the verbs function as synonyms: if you believe, you obey, if you obey, you fight when you are ordered to do so (Simonini, 1978: 39). Indeed, some of Fascism’s most famous slogans inevitably call to mind the rhetoric employed by the Italian Soka Gakkai:

²¹ The Italian term for “hook up” is “cuccare”, a slang loaded with sexual references. According to the testimonial of Ernesto Rossi (former Area leader in Rome), senior leaders were also instructed to “fuck with the guests” (“fottere gli ospiti”), i.e., to find every possible excuse to make them return to a meeting.

²² On the language of Fascism see Augusto Simonini (1978) *Il Linguaggio di Mussolini*. Milano: Bompiani, and in particular pp. 57-8 for Fascism’s use of Christian references.

- La parola d'ordine non può essere che questa: *disciplina*. Disciplina all'interno per avere di fronte all'esterno il blocco granitico di un' unica volontà nazionale.²³
- Qui è la nostra forza, cioè nella subordinazione, nell'accettare la disciplina specialmente quando ci è ingrata.²⁴
- La disciplina nel Fascismo ha veramente aspetti di religione. Qui si appalesa nelle sue stigmate infallibili il volto e l'anima della gente che nelle trincee ha appreso a coniugare in tutti i modi e i tempi il verbo sacro a tutte le religioni: *obbedire*.²⁵
- La disciplina deve essere accettata. Quando non è accettata deve essere imposta.²⁶
- La disciplina dal basso all'alto non deve essere formale ma sostanziale, e tipicamente religiosa, cioè assoluta.²⁷
- Il Fascismo non è solo un partito, è un regime, non è soltanto un regime, ma una fede; non è soltanto una fede, ma una religione.²⁸

²³ "There can only be one watchword: discipline. Internal discipline so that a granite block of exceptional national willpower faces what lies outside external to it" (Mussolini, 22 June 1925). Mussolini's speeches are collected in Edoardo and Duilio Susmel (1951-63) (eds.) *Benito Mussolini, Opera Omnia*, voll. 36, Firenze : La Fenice. All quotations used in this page are reported in Simonini (1978: 92-3). Emphasis in the original.

²⁴ "Here is our strength, that is in subordination, in accepting discipline, especially when it is unwelcome to us" (Mussolini, 15 May 1925).

²⁵ "Fascism's discipline truly has religious aspects. It is here that the infallible stigmate show themselves on the face and soul of people who learned in the trenches to connect, at all times and in all ways, to the one verb that is sacred to all religions: *to obey*" (Mussolini, February 1925).

²⁶ "One must accept discipline. If it isn't accepted, it must be imposed" (Mussolini, 20 September 1920).

²⁷ "Discipline from top to bottom must never be a mere formality but must be substantive and typically religious, that is absolute" (Mussolini, October 1925).

²⁸ "Fascism is not merely a party, it is not merely a regime, but a faith, and it is not simply a faith but a religion" (Mussolini 18 August 1926).

- Chi non è pronto a morire per la sua fede, non è degno di professarla.²⁹
- Il Fascismo è diventato, come lo volevo: *la religione civile* di tutti gli Italiani che sono degni del nome di Italiani.³⁰

The parallel between the language of Fascism and the language of the Italian Soka Gakkai is useful to illustrate the extent in which Italian speakers are ready to accept the metonymic coincidence between the semantic area of *religione* and the semantic areas pertaining to “discipline, obedience, and hierarchy”. The idea of religion is undoubtedly influenced by the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, which bases the construction of its “religious authority” upon the institutionalised charisma of the Pope and its hierarchic ordained priesthood:

The Church stands for the eternal presence of Jesus Christ in history, and the papacy is based on the founder’s explicit designation of Peter as the foundation rock of the Church. Roman Catholicism claims a direct succession of papal authority from Peter to the present pope, and this claim to legitimacy, which under the pope’s sanction extends to the entire Roman Catholic priesthood, is a vital element in grounding the authority of the Church and has proved its strength as a source of authority in the lives of its adherents (Waida, 1987: 2).

The hierarchic flow of religious authority is built in Italian Soka Gakkai through the metaphor of the “bridge” (“il ponte”), that had firstly appeared in July 2000 editorial. It may be worth to note here that Italians are ready to recognise in the word *ponte* the religious etymology of *Pontefice* as stemming from the Latin word *pontifex*, which

²⁹ “Who isn’t ready to die for his faith, it not worthy of professing it”(Mussolini, 27 October 1930).

³⁰ “Fascism has become what I wanted it to become: the *civic religion* of all Italians who are worthy of being called Italians” (Mussolini, 31 October 1926).

indicates the priest endowed by the *charisma* to function as a bridge between God and human beings.

Luciano Cavalli (1981; 1995; 1998) has analysed the extent in which Italy is dominated by “a leader-centred culture” (1998: 167) by virtue of its strict relationship with the Catholic Church. Religious honours are devoted by contiguity to all leaders who, through slogans or personal symbols, come to be perceived as superior or exceptional, and thus transfigured into a cult object. The cult of the leader can be genuine (as in the case of spontaneous, popular devotion), or can be artificially created by a careful manipulation of pseudo-religious elements, such as rituals and myths (163). In Italy, the identification of the Buddhist Law and Daisaku Ikeda firmly places *sensei* in the role of the charismatic leader. To celebrate his figure, every general meeting displays a large photograph of him, and opens with a choir performing the song *Io ho un Maestro*. Following this, a video recording of his speech is played (in Japanese) and then translated and commented on by a senior leader. The use of audio visual media had the effect of bringing the image of Ikeda close to every single member of the organisation, but it also had the effect of rendering him ubiquitous and, at the same time, unreachable and remote.

The first “bridge” between *sensei* and his Italian followers, then, must necessarily be the *Ministri di Culto*, whose personnel travel every month to Japan to bring home guidance and instructions. The *Ministri di Culto*, alone can preserve and communicate the purity of *sensei*’s teachings. To do so, senior leaders are assigned throughout the whole territory to allow the Law to flow to every member of the organisation. The necessary pre-requisite of senior members must thus be to be able to receive the guidance and pass it on without distortion or personal interpretation (*ritocchi personali*). The “Montecatini purge” was justified by the need to expel all those *Responsabili* who

“in the name of a false idea of democracy” (“in base a una idea di falsa democrazia”) were not ready to recognise the authority of the *Ministri di Culto*.³¹

The editorial appeared in September 2000 (NR 223:3) is aimed at further reinforcing the figure of the General Director as a source of religious authority in virtue of his “closeness to *sensei*” (“più vicino al maestro”). The concept is introduced through a sport metaphor which compares Buddhism to football and the General Director to a good coach who, thanks to his experience and his understanding of the strategies, can lead his team to excellence:

Un altro punto fondamentale è che il Buddismo è uguale alla vita quotidiana: in tutti gli sport, calcio, tennis, ecc. c'è sempre un allenatore che decide la strategia da seguire e insegna come fare per ottenere dei buoni risultati, perché ha più esperienza e una conoscenza più profonda.³²

From the domain of sport, the accent shifts to the figure of the General Director who, being close to Ikeda has a deeper understanding of “il tempo e il paese”, i.e. of the correct strategies to propagate Buddhism in the country and lead Italian members to “victory and happiness”:

Lo stesso vale per la nostra organizzazione: noi abbiamo il nostro Direttore generale che è come l'allenatore, è lui che, essendo più vicino al maestro, ci indica le linee generali da seguire, ci guida comprendendo il tempo e il paese, e quindi ci “allena” per arrivare al traguardo della vittoria, che è la nostra felicità personale e quella di molte persone insieme a noi. Quest'anno il nostro scopo è

³¹ The article, written by Giovanni Littera and aptly titled “La severità forgia il carattere di un leader” was published in a newsletter attached to NR 222, August 2000: iii.

³² “Another fundamental point is that Buddhism is the same as daily life: in all sports, football, tennis, etc, there is always a trainer who decides the strategy to follow and who instructs how to achieve good results, because he has experience and a deeper understanding”.

grande: grandi devono essere la consapevolezza, lo sforzo, la passione e la severità con noi stessi!³³

Again, the editorial underlines the keywords of “effort” and “severity” and reiterates the concept of blind allegiance: since the master embodies the higher degree of wisdom, and the disciple embodies the lesser degree of wisdom, faith in Buddhism must be expressed by always saying “yes” to the leader’s orders:

Nel mondo della fede si deve rispondere, sì! Dal momento che maestro significa più esperienza, più compassione, più conoscenza, discepolo significa poca esperienza, poca compassione, poca conoscenza, e allora prima occorre “fare” ciò che indica il maestro, eventualmente se ne può discutere in seguito.³⁴

The call to “total action” in the name of the master is further reinforced by the slogan “Io determino di soffrire e di sforzarmi” (“I decide to suffer and force myself”), with which SG’s members were asked to “sudare sangue” (“sweat blood”) to propagate the movement in Italy (NR 224, 2000: 9).

In their careful balance of Buddhist concepts and domestic religious references (martyrdom, sin, guilt) SG’s rhetorical strategies proved to be successful among the majority of Italian SG adherents, who did not spare any efforts to win new converts to the movement. On his December 2000 editorial, in fact, the General Director Giovanni

³³ “The same goes for our organization: we have our General Director who is like the trainer, he is the one who, being near to the master, indicates to us the general lines to follow, guides us, understanding the times and the country, and therefore “trains” us to arrive at the finish-line of victory which is our personal happiness and that of many people together with us. This year our goal is great: the understanding, effort, passion and severity with ourselves must be equally great”.

³⁴ “In the world of faith you must answer, yes! From the moment that master means greater experience, greater compassion, greater understanding, disciple means little experience, little compassion, little understanding, and therefore it is first necessary “to do” whatever it is that the master indicates, eventually it can later be discussed”.

Littera officially reported that “il nostro maestro è fiero di voi” (our master is proud of you all) as the goal of 30,000 membership had been finally reached (NR 226, 2000: 3).

The successful campaign of *shakubuku* seemed to reinforce the idea of *severità*, and in September 2001, a “regolamento disciplinare” (“disciplinary order”) was attached to *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (NR 265) in which IBISG members were asked to conform to a series of rules in matters of private and public life. Art. 3 explains that a “regolamento disciplinare” was necessary in order to:

prevenire e regolare eventuali patologie che si verificano nella vita comunitaria e negli assetti istituzionali dell’organizzazione. La tradizione buddista, e la Soka Gakkai in particolare, tende a privilegiare il profilo della prevenzione e della modifica dei comportamenti negativi da parte dei singoli individui.[...] Si raccomanda poi, ai Ministri di Culto e ai Responsabili, qualora si intravedessero situazioni patologiche, di intervenire tempestivamente per rimuovere eventuali comportamenti non corretti da parte dei singoli fedeli, o di responsabili di qualsiasi livello istituzionale e comunitario, e per promuovere il rispetto dell’etica buddista e dei principi della religione di Nichiren Daishonin.³⁵

As a consequence of the *regolamento disciplinare*, and to prevent “improper behaviour”, the newly appointed Ministry of Religious Worship (Consiglio dei Ministri di Culto) will, between 2001 and 2002, remove from their leadership position a total of 1,500 *Responsabili*. (Macioti, 2002b: 90).

³⁵ To forestall and control possible pathologies that may arise in community life and in the organization’s institutional arrangements. Buddhist tradition, and the Soka Gakkai in particular, tends to observe a preventative outlook by means of which negative behaviour on the part of individuals may be modified. [...] Accordingly, it is recommended that the Ministry of Religious Worship and others in leadership positions, regardless of the institutional or communal levels they may occupy, intervene promptly whenever they observe pathological situations developing both in order to eliminate potentially improper behaviour on the part of single worshippers and to promote respect for Buddhist ethics and the religious principles of Nichiren Daishonin.

In time however, and in consequence of the negative media coverage, IBISG was forced re-consider its organisational structure. In 2004, a new Japanese General Director, Tamotsu Nakajima was appointed. Today, the Istituto Buddista acknowledges that “in the past, a too strict adherence to discipline had caused discomfort and sorrow” ((NR 324, 2005: 2-5) and declares that:

Lo scopo dell’Organizzazione è sostenervi gli uni con gli altri andando avanti insieme. Se l’Organizzazione fosse solo potere e gerarchia, chi desidererebbe unirsi a noi?³⁶

In any case, the Italian Soka Gakkai continues to flourish on Italian soil and has replaced its numerical losses with an increasing numbers of new recruits. Beginning in 2004, the IBISG leadership has gradually modified the procedures for conversion to allow *Gohonzon* conferrals to take place every month (NR. 324, 2005: 2). The official conversion protocol no longer prescribes examinations and study meetings, and novices may request a *Gohonzon* after just one month of practice. This decision was criticised by many Soka Gakkai members, who claimed that such a short period of practice could not adequately prepare the new converts for a lifetime membership to Soka Gakkai. In a long interview published in *Il Nuovo Rinascimento* (NR. 324, 2005: 2-5), Mr. Nakajima IBISG’s General Director, explains the decision to relax the requirements as being in line with the Soka Gakkai’s mission for *kosen rufu*, and its desire to offer the *Gohonzon* to an ever increasing number of people (2). Nakajima maintains that “nobody can arrogate himself the right to decide if new converts have enough experience, or to assess whether they have enough knowledge of Buddhism” (Ibid.). According to Nakajima, in fact, each individual will be able to develop is knowledge of

³⁶ “The goal of the Organization is to carry along both one and the other moving ahead together. If the Organization was only all about power and hierarchy, who would want to join us?”

Buddhism *after* the conversion, and in accordance to his or her personal attitudes and inclinations: “se la sua tendenza e quella di studiare, studierà. Altrimenti no”(3). Also, it is not necessary for the convert to have a precise knowledge of the organisations he is joining, or to nourish feelings of pride and gratitude for having been able to practice Buddhism “correctly” thanks to the Soka Gakkai:

Non e' neanche necessario che si renda conto fino in fondo di entrare a far parte di un grande movimento come la SGI e che provi orgoglio e gratitudine. Questo e' un punto di vista valido per noi che siamo coscienti di aver conosciuto il Buddismo e di poterlo praticare correttamente grazie alla Soka Gakkai. Per chi comincia è sufficiente praticare, fare Gongyo, Daimoku, Shakubuku (3)

Thus, the ability to read the *gongyo* book, to chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* and to convert other people are considered today as the sole prerequisites for receiving the *Gohonzon* and lifetime membership to Soka Gakkai.

In his article “Why Strict Churches are Strong” (1994), Lawrence Iannaccone examines the positive relationship that exists between the strictness of a religious movement and its growth rates and argues that “in principle, perhaps, religion can be purely private, but in practice it appears to be much more compelling and attractive when experienced in groups” (1184.) According to this analysis, those religious denominations which more closely conform to the ideal-type of conservative church, whose traits include a propensity to absolutism, conformity and fanaticism, display

higher growth rates than the more liberal religious denominations. As Iannaccone writes:

The pleasure and edification that I derive from a Sunday service does not depend solely on what I bring to the service, it also depend on how many others attend, how warmly they greet me, how well they sing or recite, how enthusiastically they read and pray and how deeps their commitments are (Ibid.).

Iannaccone's observation seem appropriate when applied to the adaptive strategies of Soka Gakkai in Italy. In 2000, Maria Immacolata Macioti had expressed her surprise over the rapid dissemination of the *Organizzazione* by commenting that:

given that Italy is traditionally a Catholic country, it might have been expected that here, more than anywhere, it would have been difficult for a Buddhist school – whose very name sounds alien to Italian culture – to penetrate (375).

But as has been seen in this chapter, the Soka Gakkai adaptative strategy in Italy has been well thought-out including, as it does, not only a near total foreignisation of its vocabulary, but also the construction of a religious and solemn language “grounded in alien words” (Robinson, 1996:115) upon which it has constructed its religious authority. The movement then developed this authority through a process of gradual domestication of Soka Gakkai's ideology and practices, modelled on the domestic idea of *religione*, which, in turn, followed the existing blueprint provided by the Roman Catholic Church.

Viewing matters through the lens of Translation Studies, it is thus possible to conclude, in contrast to those sociological analyses which have examined the successful dissemination of Soka Gakkai purely as a phenomenon that occurred *in spite* of Italy's

Catholic religious tradition, that the Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai flourished in Italy precisely *by virtue* of the peculiar Italian identity of this “Catholic country”.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I have viewed religions as nomadic entities, which mutate their ideas and practices in the process of adapting themselves to the specific situations they encounter. Religions migrate and function as contact zones between cultures, and people touched by new forms of worship are required to challenge their own cultural self-definitions, their own linguistic assumptions, and the very core of their identities to accommodate what is perceived – at first – as a religious “otherness”.

I have also relied upon the allied notions of Source and Target to indicate the point of departure and the point of arrival in the voyage of one particular religion, Buddhism as conceptualised by the Japanese movement Soka Gakkai, which travelled from Japan to successfully establish itself in Italy. This migratory process may be defined as “a translation”, since the major assumption undergirding this dissertation is that religions are “texts”, whose vocabulary, language, symbols and ritual practices need to be deciphered and translated whenever they are transferred to a new country.

This thesis is based upon a case study of cultural translation of a group of religious concepts at the core of the Japanese tradition of Soka Gakkai into Italian society. To date, little research has dealt specifically with the movement’s adaptative strategies in Italy, and what research does exist is premised upon sociological models of study lying far outside the field of Translation Studies.

I began writing this dissertation firmly anchored within a Translation Studies perspective with the conviction that religious translation is a process of interpretation and adaptation which arises out of a complex linguistic and cultural interplay. My aim throughout has been to examine the types of interpretative problems that have occurred

in Italy as the Italian society – a society firmly rooted in Christian practices – has struggled to integrate the rituals and formulae of Buddhism.

My starting point was that the translation of a religion is part of a cultural system of values and cannot be explored in a vacuum. Rather, it needs to be viewed in its mutual interdependence with other elements of such system. Giambattista Vico's hypothesis that "whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand" (1774: 60 § 122) has been central to me in this endeavour, as I have examined the interplay of local and foreign tradition in the translation and gradual domestication of the Soka Gakkai in its religious migration from East to West.

Through the notion of cultural repertoire, i.e. "the aggregate of options utilised by a group of people for the organisation of life" (Even-Zohar, 1997: 355), I also have explored the extent to which the Roman Catholic Church in Italy has influenced the formation of both a religious sense and a religious vocabulary. In this respect, and as I have sought to demonstrate, Catholic practices constitute an Italian home-repertoire in terms of religious matters, particularly if one considers the Roman Catholic Church not only in terms of "official" religiosity, but also in terms of what I have defined as "Catholic religious memory", a memory which shapes the mass of orienting principles that conditions individual's responses to everyday circumstances of various kind, be they moral, political or linguistic. Thus, it has been underlined how, at the moment it entered into the Italian system, Buddhism represented an "imported-but-not-yet-integrated" (Pym, 1998: 359) religious repertoire and was forced to place itself in an extreme peripheral position within Italian society.

As for language, I have described how ecclesiastic terminology firmly occupies a central position within an Italian religious system, which, in turn, has hindered Buddhist references from being smoothly integrated into standard Italian vocabulary. I

have used notions of foreignisation and domestication to illustrate the process by which the Italian branch of the Soka Gakkai movement has been able to rewrite core religious tenets, and thereby engage in effective recruitment to its ranks by cloaking those tenets with a veneer of foreignisation. In addition, I have traced how the Soka Gakkai has been able to profit from a pre-existing linguistic religious capital both to become more credible to potential Italian adherents and, at the same time, to minimize internal dissent. This has entailed modelling its language on the blueprint of the Roman Catholic tradition – a tradition which, from the Counter Reformation onwards, has contributed to the popular view in Italy that a “religion”, properly speaking, can only be a strict hierarchical body whose leaders are endowed with the authority to “speak the truth”, and whose supreme head is endowed with unquestionable charismatic authority.

In this dissertation, I have relied upon tools commonly used in the sociological study of religions to examine the development of Soka Gakkai and to trace the various strategies through which – from its early origins as a Nichirenite movement in Japan, Soka Gakkai has modified its characteristics to successfully become one of the most popular and celebrated religious movements in the West, devoted to the spreading of peace and non-violence. Specifically, I have reported on studies on the SGI’s adaptive strategies in countries such as the USA, Britain and Germany to illustrate the difference between these cases and what has occurred in Italy. As these studies have suggested, throughout the Western world the SGI gradually downplayed its peculiar Japanese elements and “exotic character” (Wilson, 2000: 353) and has radically modified its rituals to create a Western style of religious practice (Machacek, 2000: 287). Scholars have described the Soka Gakkai’s organisational structure as “moving away from the patriarchal hierarchy of SGI in Japan” (Ibid.) and have celebrated its “strong democratic and egalitarian emphasis” (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 166).

Yet, prior sociological analyses of Soka Gakkai have failed to offer a satisfactory reason for the success and exceptional growth of its membership in Italy, nor they have been able to offer a valid explanation for the authoritarian elements that have emerged recently in Italy (cfr. Macioti 2002c). Indeed, as we have seen, the history and dissemination of Soka Gakkai in Italy has followed a path which radically differs from the egalitarian one advanced in other Western countries. Also, the Italian organisation has maintained a strict adherence to its parent Japanese organisation, both in terms of language and ritual practices and in terms of organisational structure.

The explanation for this has to do with the legacy of the *Mistica Fascista*¹ in Italy. As Umberto Eco (1995) has written:

though political regimes can be overthrown, and ideologies can be criticised and disowned, behind a regime and its ideology there is always a way of thinking and feeling, a group of cultural habits, of obscure instincts and unfathomable drives.²

Exploring the genesis of Fascist thought, Eco defines as “Ur-Fascism” the kernel of elements which has produced certain linguistic habits that underlie feelings and beliefs in Italian culture. Ur-Fascism derives from individual or social frustration. This is why one of the most typical features of historical Fascism has been its appeal to a frustrated middle class. Ur-Fascism builds upon the cult of tradition, which it has inherited from counter-revolutionary Catholic thought, and it employs a sacral language to convey a religious sense of belonging to a chosen elite. In essence, the basic assumption of the *mistica fascista* is that:

¹ The term *Mistica Fascista* derives from the *Scuola di Mistica Fascista*, of the 1930s, i.e. the introduction in Italian universities of a curriculum of studies on Fascism, which included courses on *Mussolinismo Imperiale* and *Lecturae Ducis*.

² Umberto Eco (1995) “Ur-Fascism”. *The New York Review of Books*, 42.11. June, 22. Electronic source: < <http://www.nybooks.com/contents/19950622> >

The members of the party are the best among the citizens, every citizen can (or ought to) become a member of the party. But there cannot be patricians without plebeians. In fact, the Leader, knowing that his power was not delegated to him democratically but was conquered by force, also knows that his force is based upon the weakness of the masses; they are so weak as to need and deserve a ruler. Since the group is hierarchically organised (according to a military model), every subordinate leader despises his own underlings, and each of them despises his inferiors. This reinforces the sense of mass elitism.(Eco, Ibid.)

As has been highlighted in this dissertation, a parallel can be drawn between the *mistica fascista* and the *mistica buddista* as conceptualised by Soka Gakkai's *Responsabili* in Italy, who have gradually worked to create a strictly hierarchic army of *Kosen rufu* warriors, instructed to spare no efforts in the propagation of Soka Gakkai's vision of "Peace, Culture and Education" and to win new converts to the cause. In this, the use of Buddese, the jargon evolved from the interplay of Japanese vocabulary and Italian references, dovetailed perfectly to produce the sacral language through which the SG's Italian leadership now conveys the mystique of their movement to the faithful.

After having articulated a comparative analysis of the language of Fascism and the language of Soka Gakkai (see Chapter 5), I believe it reasonable to conclude the following: first, that the Italian Soka Gakkai "familiarised" its translations according to Italian cultural categories thus creating a grey area where the constant reference to a deeper well of Catholic religious language opened up the possibility for religious manipulation of its texts to attract new adherent. Second, following the textual manipulation to increase its membership – a membership drawn from those elements of Italian society who felt that their spiritual needs were not being met in the contemporary religious marketplace -, the Italian Soka Gakkai drew upon the more recent political language of Italian Fascism to regiment those adherents as much as possible into

unquestioning acceptance of whatever religious pronouncements emanated from its leadership.

No matter how anarchic they may appear to foreigners, it should never be forgotten that Italians invented Fascism. Certainly the Italian leadership of the SG did not overlook this fact. On the contrary, it drew upon the latent cultural and linguistic habits, obscure instincts and unfathomable drives that lay behind Italian culture's creation of Fascism to enable it to construct one of the most vibrant new religious movements the West has ever seen. In short, the Soka Gakkai movement in Italy can be seen as the rarest of things: a near perfect translation.

GLOSSARY

AINS – Associazione Italiana Nichiren Shoshu. Founded in 1981, it changed its name into Istituto Soka Gakkai in 1993; and in 1998 it became known as the Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai.

Bodhisattva – From *Bodhi*, wisdom of the Buddha, and *sattva*, to be aware, or conscious of it. A bodhisattva is a disciple of the Buddha who seeks the path to enlightenment.

Buddha – Enlightened one, who has acquired a state of peace and eternal happiness. If no other specification is made, the reference is generally to the historical Buddha (Gautama), otherwise known as Shakyamuni, which means “the Sage of the Shakyas”. In Soka Gakkai, the reference can either be to him or to Nichiren Daishonin, the Original Buddha.

Butsudan – Buddhist altar in which the object of devotion is kept safely. In the case of the Nichiren school of Buddhism, the object of devotion is the *Gohonzon*.

Butsuma – The room in which the *butsudan* is placed.

Dai-Gohonzon – The *Object of Devotion*, a wooden *mandala* inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin on 12 October 1279. *Dai* refers to the concept of greatness; *gozè* is an honorary prefix. *Honzon* is the object of devotion.

Daimoku – The title of the *Lotus Sutra*. It is also the invocation *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, one of the *Three Great Secret Law* of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

Daishonin – Nichiren's honorific title. *Dai* indicates great, supreme; *shonin*, Buddha or sage. The implication here is that Nichiren is the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

Gohonzon – It is *Object of Devotion* of the Soka Gakkai. Soka Gakkai's members receive their personal *Gohonzon* (a copy of the *Dai-Gohonzon* inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin) at *Gojukai*, the Conversion Ceremony.

Gojukai – The Japanese term *Gojukai* is maintained in Italy to refer to the Conversion Ceremony to Soka Gakkai. It is the ceremony in which Soka Gakkai's members promise to embrace the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, and to discard every other religion.

Gongyo – The basic element of Buddhist practice that adherents of Soka Gakkai carry out, morning and evening, in front of the *Gohonzon*. It consist in the repetition of a part of the *Hoben* chapter and of the entire *Juryo* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. Silent prayers and the continuous chanting of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* generally follow *gongyo*.

Gosho – The entirety of Nichiren's teachings. The term can also be used to indicate each single written work. Taken together, the *gosho* include letters of encouragement to individual believers, treatises on Buddhism, and doctrinal teachings.

Kudoku – Benefit. A term used to indicate the positive effects of the Buddhist practice. Benefits can be material or spiritual, the later being much more long-term and of greater importance. Nichiren Daishonin taught that *ku* means to eliminate evil, and *doku* refers to the possibility of producing good. The ultimate meaning of benefit, however, is attaining Buddhahood.

IBISG – Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai. Registered as religious body (Ente Religioso) in 1998.

ISG – Istituto Soka Gakkai, founded as a lay association in 1981, became a religious entity in 1998, and was subsequently renamed as Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai.

Itai doshin – In Nichiren's teachings, the unity of the people who struggle for the common goal of *Kosen Rufu*, based on faith in the *Gohonzon*. From *itai*, different body; and *doshin*, one in mind.

Kaikan – From *Kai*, meeting place, and *Kan*, large construction. In Soka Gakkai, it is considered to be “the land of the Buddha”. In the English translation, *kaikan* becomes “cultural centre”. The Italian use maintains the Japanese term.

Kosen Rufu – The term appears in the *Yakuo* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren Daishonin interpreted it as “to widely proclaim and spread” *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. The consequence of such action would be lasting peace and happiness for all mankind. Soka Gakkai translate the term as “peace in the world”

Mandala – In Sanskrit, the term means “accumulation of benefit.” In Soka Gakkai, it refers to the *Gohonzon*, since the *Gohonzon* is considered to contain the practices and benefits of all the Buddhas in the universe.

Naitoku – Beginner. It is the status of Soka Gakkai's adherents prior to their Ceremony of Conversion.

Sensei – Literally “Teacher”. In Soka Gakkai the title is accorded to Daisaku Ikeda.

Shakubuku – Literally to “break and subdue” (false teachings). The term refers to Soka Gakkai's traditional vigorous method of proselytizing.

Shinrai – Guest. People attending a Soka Gakkai's meeting for the first time.

Shitei funi – “Two-yet-no-two”. The term defines the relationship between Master and Disciple.

Shoten zenjin – Buddhist protective deities. Soka Gakkai translate the concept as “protective functions of life”.

Testimonials – *Esperienze* in Italian. Testimonials are first person narratives shared at a *zadankai* or at other types of meetings. Testimonials serve to encourage whoever is listening to practice more vigorously.

Zadankai –Small discussion group. In Italian, the term is translated into the English “meeting”

Zaimu – Literally “finance”. Voluntary contribution that sustain Buddhist activities.

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Appendix 1

BBC World News and Current Affairs

Assignment:

THE CHANTING MILLIONS

October 14th, 1995

<<http://www.toride.org/edata/bbc.html>>

NARRATION:

In the year we commemorate the allied victory over Japan and the terrible atrocities it revealed, we are again reminded that this is a land of puzzling contradictions. As well as ornate temples and pastoral calm, and mysticism, and pacifism, there are sudden eruptions of extreme violence.

When, this year, poison gas was released into the Tokyo subway, the shocking suspicion emerged that it was done by a religious cult that claims its roots in Buddhism. It was in the foothills of Japan's sacred Mt. Fuji that the Aum-Shinrikyo sect that stands accused of a gas-attack trained its followers. It was in Buddhist Teachings and in The Book of Revelation, grossly perverted and corrupted, the justification was somehow found for mass-murder. That is the charge that faces the charismatic leader of Aum, Shoko Asahara, when he shortly goes on trial.

The Aum-case raises many concerns that have come up in foreign relation to other cults around the world. But it also poses questions that are peculiar to Japan. Above all, the Aum case calls into question of law the status and the influence of the vast number of other religious groups. Believe it or not, in Japan, today, there are roughly 241,000 officially registered religious organizations. Most of them are very small, but some are big and powerful. But with ten million followers, is by far the biggest, Soka Gakkai.

SOKA GAKKAI ACTIVITIES

Soka Gakkai is much more than a religious organization. It's a wide spread social and political movement, highly disciplined, some say dangerous. Head of Soka Gakkai since 1960 is Daisaku Ikeda.

Ikeda is the great cultural and, for his supporters, spiritual leader. Another view says he's a bully with a lust for power.

INTERVIEW WITH IKEDA: I'm a common, serious-minded man. The mass-media ..., with the exception of the BBC, make up this image of me as a dictator, and so forth. This troubles me.

Common men, however serious, do not find themselves as Mr. Ikeda frequently does, in the company of international elite that includes the likes of Mrs. Thatcher. He's frequently photographed with royalty, prime ministers and presidents. When president Mandela came recently to Japan on a state visit, his only private audience was with Mr. Ikeda. Why is a man who has never held public office found in such company? He has access to great wealth, but is that enough? Since powerful people seek the company of other powerful people, what does that tell us about Mr. Ikeda?

INTERVIEW WITH POLITICAL COMMENTATOR MR. MINORU MORITA: I don't think anyone has more power in Japan than Ikeda. No one.

FOUNDATION OF IKEDA'S POWER -- TAISEKIJI-TEMPLE OF NICHIREN SHOSHU

This is the foundation of Mr. Ikeda's power. S.G. was the lay- organization founded to support Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, a 700 year-old sect. These followers of a 13th century Japanese monk, are considered heretical by main-stream Buddhist's. Central to their belief is the power of chanting, that by the invocalational recitation of the words

"Nam'-myo-ho-ren-ge-kyo" almost anything can be achieved. S. G. took these

ancient simple beliefs and marketed them with astounding success. It may look spiritual, but S.G. is all about practical things. That includes personal wealth and political power. It's in Japan's cities that Soka Gakkai gained most of its support. In the post war years, it grew rapidly, and it's thought to have had special appeal for a defeated and disillusioned generation. The faithful are expected to chant daily, to donate generously to Soka Gakkai funds, and to recruit new members.

INTERVIEW WITH S.G. MEMBERS IN KAWASAKI CITY, SOUTH OF TOKYO

In the city of Kawasaki, south of Tokyo, Soka Gakkai has devoted support from the Umezawa family, who own a small chain of beauty parlors. Apart from the father of the family, all the others, son, daughters and inlaws are in the business. First to join Soka Gakkai was Mrs. Umezawa. Not only she converted the rest of the family, but between them, they've introduced 112 other families to the practice of daily chanting. Now retired Mr. Umezawa sometimes chants for 5 hours a day. He and his family have no doubt that the growth of their business and other good fortune is entirely due to regular practice of this ritual. They faithfully pay their dues to Soka Gakkai, and according to Mrs. Umezawa, their loyalty and their chanting is rewarded.

MRS. YOSHIE UMEZAWA: We were always short of money. Although we worked very hard, things were tough. Now we travel abroad without any financial difficulty. It's not only to make money that the Umezawas practice their daily chanting.

MR. TADASHI UMEZAWA: When my wife was pregnant, we talked about an abortion because I didn't want any more daughters. Soka Gakkai members told me that if I practiced hard, we might have a son. We chanted, and as a result, we had a son!

No doubt, Soka Gakkai has many satisfied members. But some feel betrayed, sensing that their loyalty, and their money, and their votes have been exploited to serve the political ambitions of Mr. Ikeda. He founded his own political party in 1964, and although it's been partially dissolved, suspicions remain, some of them, expressed at this protest meeting of former Soka Gakkai members.

KEIGO OUCHI (Member of Parliament at a meeting of AVSG - Asociation of Victims of Soka Gakkai): Mr. Ikeda often says he will take over Japanese politics and become the real leader of the Government.

Although Soka Gakkai has taken steps to sever former links with its political party, it still commands a block vote to use as it wishes.

INTERVIEW WITH POLITICAL COMMENTATOR, MR. MINORU MORITA:

Soka Gakkai is able to mobilize 6 million votes. These 6 million votes represent more than ten per cent of the electorate. Mr. Ikeda, as the head of S.G. has a strong influence over the political world. Of 700 disgruntled former members here (at the meeting), many complain of how Soka Gakkai extracted money from them.

HIROHISA MASUDA (Former S.G. member): In 1982, when my grandfather died and we inherited his property, members of Soka Gakkai came, repeatedly, and demanded contributions. They wanted 10 million yen (U.S. \$100,000). In the end we gave them 5 million yen. Of course, Soka Gakkai justifies all of its money raising activities.

INTERVIEW WITH IKEDA: We want to promote a good religion. Religion is a metaphysical concept, but it needs to be advertised like any good product.

ADVERTISEMENT OF SOKA GAKKAI (S.G.I. PR video-tape): Soka Gakkai has gloriously embarked on its voyage toward the 70th anniversary of its founding. The Soka family throughout the world will continue to advance cheerfully and harmoniously in its Kosen-Rufu activities day and night, widening the current of Buddhism among the people throughout the universe, heralding the era of peace and freedom.

Yes, Soka Gakkai is now international. In the U.K. this is its lavish headquarters used by some 8,000 members. But in the U.S. and notably in California, Soka

Gakkai has greater success, claiming some 150,000 adherents. But it's also been much criticized and even classified as a dangerous cult.

FRANK ROSS (Former S.G.I. leader): I think by anybody's definition of a cult, if someone's life is completely controlled by an individual or an organization, that would certainly fit into the category of a cult. When I was in S.G.I., I would have died for Ikeda. And I know hundreds of people that felt the same way.

AL ALBERGATE (SGI-USA Public relations director): I reject categorically the idea that we are a dangerous cult, because to me that would imply a pseudo religion that exists mainly to take advantage of people, whether financially or psychologically, and I know in my 28 years in the organization, we have never done that.

In America too, there are certainly satisfied customers. Among the affluent, who have seaside homes at Malibu, are those who believe that chanting has brought them health, wealth and happiness, and spread the word among their friends and neighbours.

NEIL STEVENS (S.G.I. member) (Note: At a discussion meeting): I'd like to welcome everyone. We're going to chant, what we call morning evening gongyo...

Neil Stevens is an investment banker. He and his wife, Lynn, hold weekly meetings, where they introduce new comers to the practice of chanting.

(Scene of members chanting.)

For some newcomers, chanting in a foreign tongue seems odd. (Shot of woman sitting on couch at meeting, rolling her eyes as she looks on in disbelief, looking as if she wants to bolt out the door any second.) But believers are keen to extol the reward and the enlightenment it brings.

INTERVIEW WITH MR. AND MRS. STEVENS:

LYNN: (Gushing tears) I thank, I thank everyday, the girl that introduced this practice to me, 'cause it changed my life. I have such a beautiful husband, a beautiful daughter. When I had, lost three little babies....and I had such, uh, oh, I don't know...I had so much fortune, but yet, that doesn't guarantee that you are going to be happy. And I was able to, ummm, uh tap into the joy in my life, and change such poison into medicine, and make all my dreams come true, and I really have.

NEIL: (Tears smeared on his face) So then Katy's got me going on this doing the Nam-myo-ho-ren-ge-kyo thing, and, uhh, it really empowered me to create, uhh, pretty much my business dream, the beginning of it, anyway, and, uhh, really helped us push it through, uhh, when we had, you know, tremendous obstacles.

AL ALBERGATE: The actual practice of Buddhism is very accesible to everybody. Because there's a very simple formula and a daily practice, plus the idea that you tap so directly into your Buddha nature, your life condition, that you can actually see results in your daily life.

DIANE HONEYMAN-BLOEDIE (Former S.G.I. member): It turned my life into a living hell, basically. I was miserable!

INTERVIEWER: Why principally?

DIANE: Mostly because of my husband. They manipulated my husband into becoming a totally different person. He was not the person I fell in love, and married, and wanted to spend the rest of my life with. He became totally obsessed; was never home. They had him going 24 hours a day. And he was hell to live with.

AL ALBERGATE: If we put pressure on each other, it was only so that we could, duh, move forward and advance as a religious organization in this country it was not..., primary, our idea was never to take people's money.

DIANE HONEYMAN-BLOEDIE: As I was walking out the building, one of the "Women's Division leaders said, "Did you make a contribution today?" and I said, "No, I don't have any money to make a contribution. I have 5 dollars in my purse" (She said), "You should give that \$5." (I said,) "It's Tuesday. I don't get paid until Friday. I have to buy milk." She said, "If you give the \$5 today, it'll come back to you in a much bigger way." So I said, "So you're telling me, I shouldn't buy milk for

my 18 month old daughter and I should give the \$5 to you?" and she said, "Yeah." and I said, "No."

AL ALBERGATE: Some of our members and leaders, although sincere, were overzealous. And, basically, about 5 years ago, we just put an end to most specific targets and just decided that the best way to go was to just help people practice Buddhism, and as their own personal circumstances improve in society, as they feel appreciation for this Buddhism, then they will donate.

DIANE HONEYMAN-BLOEDIE: We're their little worker bees. We're collecting all their little money, all their little honey for them, and we gladly give it over. You know, I just... My feeling was that they just think we're stupid. And if we're promised that we can get anything we want, that if we can get instant gratification, which is sort of the American way, we're gonna go for it. So that's how they pass it off. You want a car? Chant! You want a better job? Chant! You want more money? Chant!

INTERVIEWER (to Al): It occurs to me that one of the attractions, perhaps, of your particular type of Buddhism is that it does promise practical benefits.

AL ALBERGATE: That's correct. And I think that's very attractive to many people. Maybe more so Americans. We're sort of, err, an instant microwave kind of culture, and I'm sure that appeals to many, I know it appeals to many people.

INTERVIEWER: Is it somewhat dangerous, though, that if you expect it to work miracles in your life, that if you expect the Porche tomorrow, that you're going to be disappointed, and that you may think the religion has failed you?

AL ALBERGATE: Yes, that's true. It is a problem if we don't take the time to help people really study the profundity of Buddhism and to understand it's not about Porches and cars and things like that. These are nice incidentals that might come your way as a result of a higher life condition and your increased ability to work and perform your daily life. But we have to teach that, after all, the idea is to become an enlightened human being, with or without a nice car.

FRANK ROSS: People are approached from the standpoint of doing something for their personal lives, and, little by little, they are told that the only way they can advance their personal lives is to advance the organization. Once you've made that connection, that advancing the organization is advancing your personal life, then they have total control over you. So, watching the people who have been abused over time and just fleeced, you know, year in and year out for money, that certainly is a horrible form of abuse.

INTERVIEWER: But you were one of the abusers?

FRANK ROSS: Yes, I certainly was. But at that time, I didn't realize that it was abuse. I was part of that operation, and we thought that no matter what people did for the organization, it would be good for them. If that's the way it is in the United States, how much greater is the money making machine in Japan?

Soka Gakkai means "value creating society" and essentially it peddles another one of those familiar "Samuel Smile's Recipes For Self-improvement." While other philosophies suggest the ultimate values of "truth" and "goodness," Soka Gakkai contends that happiness lies also in profit, and it's something the organization itself is very good at.

PROF. HIROHISA KITANO (Professor of law at Nihon University): Nobody knows actually how rich Soka Gakkai is. Experts estimate Soka Gakkai has more than 1,000 properties throughout Japan with total assets of more than 10,000 billion yen (125 billion U.S. dollars).

In the wake of the Kobe earthquake, S.G. used its money raising skills to great effect. Special appeals were launched and Soka Gakkai membership responded with extra donations, on top of those they routinely make. More than a dozen fund raising drives have supported U.N. relief activities for refugees, and numerous exhibitions have been mounted to promote Mr. Ikeda's good works.

DAISAKU IKEDA: Religion can be compared to mother earth. We must cultivate the earth in order to bring forth plants and flowers. The promotion of peace, education, and culture is a fundamental role for religion. This is the Tokyo Soka Elementary school, part of an integrated system of private schools ranging from kindergarten to university, founded by Daisaku Ikeda. Today, the children celebrate the Tanabata Festival. These are the wish trees decked out with wish paper streamers. Each one carrying a child's wishes and dreams. Almost all of the children are from Soka Gakkai families.

HIDETO IJIMA (Soka Elementary School, 2nd grade): I am Hideto Iijima, a second-year pupil. I want to become a millionaire so that I can help the poor by giving them my money. Like the elementary school, the Soka High School is four times over-subscribed. No religion is taught here. But the children are certainly well versed in the achievements and importance of their school's founder, Mr. Ikeda.

MITSUOKO YAKANI (Soka High School student): He has a philosophy based on humanism for the education. He is also a poet, and he is like, I feel very warm meeting him. He's like, I feel like he's like my father.

DAIGO KURAIKUKO (Soka High School student): If you compare, compared to other schools, I found my friends, friends much brighter, and...

INTERVIEWER: Much brighter? Really?

DAIGO KURAIKUKO: Brighter. Yes. And...they know why they're studying. Because they have dream.

Mr. Ikeda's biggest and most powerful dream machine is another one of his creations. Seikyo Shimbun, Soka Gakkai's newspaper, is part of a large publishing empire, and has a daily circulation of 5,500,000. It's virtually compulsory reading for Soka members, as it carries a regular column by the leader, as well as promoting, in its own words, the movement for peace and culture. The paper is extremely profitable, making more than 60 million pounds a year. It has its own special view of the world and is not averse to tidying up the picture to match the Soka version of reality.

From the cradle to the grave, Soka Gakkai cares for its members. In a country of many religions, it's always been the Buddhists of Japan who have looked after the "here-after." This has worked very much to the financial benefit of Soka Gakkai. In partnership with the Mitsubishi Bank, a country-wide chain of cemeteries has been constructed, complete with piped Mozart, and with thousands of plots, all of them sold.

In Japan, it's believed that the spirits of the ancestors care for the living, and so strong emotional bonds are expressed in the way the living remember and treat the dead. This means there's great pressure to purchase a suitable and expensive memorial, and to tend it diligently. This deep sense of duty to the ancestors appears to be useful to Soka Gakkai in its dealings with members and employees.

JIRO OSHIKO (Former S.G. official): I was forced to buy a cemetery plot in Hokkaido (The northern-most island of Japan). I live in Ohmiya, a suburb of Tokyo. So, there was no need to buy a cemetery plot in a remote place like the island of Hokkaido. I was not allowed to pay for the plot in cash. I was, to some extent, coerced to take out a loan with Mitsubishi Bank. The bank calculated my monthly payments. And, in the end, I think I finished up having to pay twice the normal amount.

PROF. KITANO: The Mitsubishi Group is a major (business) concern. Before the war, Mitsubishi was even more powerful. Today the Mitsubishi Bank is Soka Gakkai's main bank. There are strong ties between them. An investigation into Soka Gakkai's gravestone business was triggered by the discovery of the yen equivalent of 1.2 million (U.S.) dollars in a safe discarded in a scrap yard.

PROF. KITANO: A top member of Soka Gakkai said it was his own, personal

money, and that it had no connection with Soka Gakkai. The tax office thought it strange, and they started a full-scale investigation.

MINORU MORITA (Political Commentator): Contributions to Japanese religious organizations are not subject to either taxation or inspection. They are free to collect and spend money as they choose. In the shadow of Mt. Fuji, there is spectacular evidence of how Soka Gakkai spent some of its vast wealth. They constructed here a complex that included halls, guest houses, shrines, and a structure that's the largest temple in Asia, and possibly the largest in the world. This is where the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood tended to the spiritual needs of the Soka Gakkai faithful. But not any longer, following a long running power struggle between Ikeda and the priesthood. He and the entire Soka Gakkai membership were excommunicated. Since 1992, the temple has been off limits, and the war of words continues.

REV. KOGAKU AKIMOTO (Nichiren-Shoshu Bureau of Religious Affairs): Our High Priest had talks with (gave guidance to) Soka Gakkai. They refused to change their ways, and we had to excommunicate them.

DAISAKU IKEDA: They mercilessly excommunicated us without any real reason. Simply because they had enough money and no longer needed us. There has been no worse incident in Buddhist history than this. They treated the believers like slaves. It was like religion in medieval times.

INTERVIEWER: And you see yourself like Luther, reforming the church and bringing it away from the corruption of Rome?

DAISAKU IKEDA: Yes, it's the same thing. History is repeating itself. It's just like Luther. I am proud of it.

Mr. Ikeda's role as a thinker, rivaling Martin Luther, is enhanced by Soka University, which he founded in 1971, which is now regarded as one of Japan's more successful seats of learning, and one of the fastest growing. It's already linked to a sister campus in California, and soon to be joined by a second. Thanks to lavish endowment, the pangs of recession have scarcely been felt here. The department of bio-engineering has recently opened and a new building program will make room for more faculties and departments that feature in the founder's vision of the future. In the university prospectus is a fullsome account of the founder's life and works, pointing out that he has tirelessly devoted his life to promoting peace, culture and education by establishing numerous cultural and educational institutions. It also lists his honorary doctorates and professorships from around the world -- over 40 of them, and his national decorations, and other major awards, and major publications! in English. There's also a translation of the founding spirit of the university, penned, of course, by Mr. Ikeda. -- "Be the highest seat of learning for humanistic education, be the cradle of a new culture, be the fortress for the peace of mankind." One of Ikeda's major publications in English is titled "Choose Life." It's a dialogue with the late Arnold J. Toynbee, distinguished British historian, and grandfather of Polly Toynbee.

POLLY TOYNBEE (Journalist): It's hard to imagine here, but the name "Toynbee," in Japan, is still extraordinarily influential. Not just in the academic world and in the political world, but the students still read his books, because he is this prophet of the rise of the Pacific Basin and the power of the Pacific.

STEVE GORE (Former SGI employee): Ikeda went to London, England to have a series of dialogues with a noted British historian, Arnold Tynbee, and we were part of the entourage traveling in a capacity as a liaison agent, but also in the ever presence, our job was to jump on a bomb, or in front of a bullet, or in front of a knife in case this man was attacked by some fanatical, unhappy person.

DAISAKU IKEDA: Dr. Toynbee welcomed me like his own son. Our talks were intense and at a very high level. We had to change interpreters twice. For the Soka faithful, the book is almost Holy Writings. Years after Prof. Toynbee's death, and to their great surprise, Polly Tynbee and her husband were invited to visit Mr. Ikeda in Japan.

POLLY TOYNBEE: Everything that we did was formal; huge, formal gatherings; meetings, with different people; meetings with the women of Soka Gakkai; meetings with different groups, people associated in their minds with my grandfather in some way or another, and we found it very oppressive; very alarming; and certainly by the time it came to the meeting with him, by then we had formed a very clear idea of this extraordinary, militarily run organization. Phenomenal power, wealth, and a sinister level of obedience.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get any impression of Ikeda, "the great spiritual leader"?

POLLY TOYNBEE: I think it would be hard to imagine a less spiritual man. He was in every way earthy. A powerful megalomania; we got this aura of power from him that was extremely alarming. We then went, on another day with him, to some huge Nuremberg style rally in a stadium, where everything was to the greater worship of him. And again, what he really liked was this feeling of power. Power and the trappings of power. This palace is the Japanese government's official guest house, where its most important visitors are housed. Recently, the press was summoned here for a photo-call to witness the presentation to Pres. Nelson Mandela of an honorary degree by Daisaku Ikeda. Throughout the ceremony, Mr. Ikeda appeared to be on the most intimate terms with the distinguished visitor.

DAISAKU IKEDA: We first met five years ago. It was a very warm occasion. He had read my book in jail. He said we should foster our friendship for the rest of my life.

POLLY TOYNBEE: What he did with my grandfather he has done time and time again with distinguished people all over the world, who haven't a clue who he is, or what he is, and just imagine that he is an important and serious Japanese leader. And so they agree to have a meeting with him, and out of perhaps one meeting comes the impression that it's a very close and important relationship, and that this person has given their full support to Ikeda and his movement.

As founder of Soka-University, Mr. Ikeda has been able to confer honorary degrees on many of Japan's most eminent visitors. When Mr. Gorbachev was so rewarded, it was another splendid opportunity with Ikeda at center stage -- friend of the powerful and patron of the arts.

Among Ikeda's more grandiose ventures in his cultural crusade is the establishment of two major museums of art. This one (Tokyo Fuji Art Museum) houses 5,000 works, including paintings by many of the greatest European masters, from all the principle periods and schools, up to the present day. Although there are fine paintings here, experts regard it as a curiously mixed bag, which may be explained, in part, by the way it was put together. When Mr. Ikeda went shopping in the art galleries of Europe, he didn't waste time on second thoughts or second opinions.

STEVE GORE: The rapidness at which Ikeda would walk through the galleries impressed me. He would spend maybe 4 to 6 minutes in each gallery. He would point and utter these commands. The names of the works, the prices and the catalog, everything was written down. Several hours later, one of the general secretaries would come back with the briefcase full of money. If the man was willing to meet for the bulk price -- the 3, 4 or 6 pieces from his gallery -- he was given the cash. I found it amazing to see how fast one man could spend so much money. Very serious questions have been asked on how so much money was spent on certain works of art, and where the money went. Here at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, negotiations allegedly took place, in 1989, for the purchase of two French impressionist paintings that are now in the Soka Gakkai collection. Tax authorities became suspicious, because both Soka Gakkai and Mitsubishi claimed to have purchased the same paintings, on the same day, in the same place, but at a different price.

Tax investigators could find no trace of two French nationals who supposedly sold the two Renoir paintings to Mitsubishi. It appears to have been a double sale of the

paintings in which 11 million (U.S.) dollars went astray -- simply disappeared.

Japanese newspapers suggest that the money probably finished-up in a political "slush-fund," and that Soka Gakkai is more interested in pedaling political influence than it is in French impressionism.

DAISAKU IKEDA: Our museum bought the Renoir masterpieces for a very high price, but I knew nothing about it. If there is a scandal, people always blame me.

No one was really made the scape-goat, although the authorities raided the premises of art dealers to discover who did sell the paintings, and to whom. And although they confiscated documents, and although Mitsubishi was ticked-off for dealing in antiques without a license, and although inquiries went on for months by official agencies and the press, nothing was resolved.

PROF. KITANO: Without finding what happened to the money, the Japanese tax office stopped their investigation. We believe that this was the result of strong political pressure by Soka Gakkai.

DAISAKU IKEDA: They can say or write what they like. They won't imprison me, or kill me with poison-gas. But I am concerned at the way the mass media becomes emotional and prejudiced. This can hinder democracy and human rights. To make sure that its members are not corrupted by hostile media, Soka Gakkai has its own communications network to spread the word to 1,000 meeting halls and cultural centers. This can be of great value when it comes to election time.

Last year, Soka Gakkai's own party, Komei, was partially merged to form a new party, Shinshin-to (New Frontier Party [NFP]). Recently, elections for the Upper House were the first real test of its strength. The voter turn-out was the lowest in recent history, benefiting the party that could best deliver the votes. The results sent shock-waves through the political circles, with the new party winning 40 seats, thanks to the Soka Gakkai vote, and that must have profound implications for Mr. Ikeda.

INTERVIEWER: As Shinshin-to, it must stand a reasonable chance, does it not, of being actually elected and forming a government?

IKEDA: I am placed in a very difficult position. If I say yes, then people might slacken their efforts. If I say no, some people may lose confidence. And so, I must say, maybe yes, and maybe no.

PROF. KITANO: Although Soka Gakkai calls itself a religious body, in reality, it's Ikeda's political organization. Ikeda's aim is to use Soka Gakkai to take over Japanese politics and the civil service.

If we conclude from all the evidence that Soka Gakkai is not quite the great force for peace and harmony and human happiness that it claims to be, does that really matter except to a number of hurt and angry individuals? For surely, the Aum- Shinrikyo case tells us that it does matter. What that bizarre story reveals is a dangerous weakness in the Japanese Constitution that leaves it virtually powerless to deal with the religious organizations. The constitution imposed on Japan by the United States, at the end of World War II, guarantees freedom from state interference with religious groups, and that provision protects their tax exempt status. Now, unless changes are made to the law, they will continue to use, or misuse, their great wealth as they will. Changes to the Religious Corporation Law could check the secret use of funds that, in the Aum-Shinrikyo case, were used to develop chemical weapons. Such reforms are now before Japan's legislatures. If they become law, they could curb the power of all religious groups, including Soka Gakkai.

In a recent development, Japan's Justice Minister announced his resignation following allegations that in a secret deal with the opposition, Shinshin-to party, he would agree to obstruct his own government's efforts to make religious organizations more accountable. The name of Soka Gakkai, through its support of Shinshin-to is bound to be linked to the scandal. The Japanese public is well aware that if recent

election results are repeated in a general election, Shinshin-to could take the reign of the government. And where then, would the real power lie?

Reporter: Julian Pettifer

Appendix 2

Polly Toynbee. "The Value of a Grandfather Figure"

Manchester Guardian/May 19, 1984

By Polly Toynbee

<<http://www.rickross.com/reference/gakkai/gakkai39.html>>

On the long flight to Japan, I read for the first time my grandfather's posthumously, published book, "Choose Life -- A Dialogue," a discussion between himself and a Japanese Buddhist leader called Daisaku Ikeda. My grandfather, the historian Arnold Toynbee was 85 when the dialogue was recorded, a short time before his final incapacitating stroke. It is probably the book among his works most kindly left forgotten -- being a long discursive ramble between the two men over topics from sex education to pollution and war.

A few months earlier, I had received a telephone call out of the blue from Mr Ikeda's London representative: Mr Ikeda was inviting my husband and myself to Japan, in memory of, and in gratitude to, my grandfather. We were puzzled at this -- eight years after his death. But perhaps it was some inexplicably Japanese sense of obligation and family beyond Western understanding. Try as we might, we could elicit no further explanation -- though by the end of our trip some much clearer motives were to emerge. As it turned out, we were to see a rather different side of Japan from the view usually afforded Western visitors.

We arrived at Tokyo airport, and at least 10 people were there to greet us, with a huge bouquet each for myself and for Milly, my astounded twelve-year-old daughter. A long solemn message of welcome from Mr Ikeda was read out, and we were driven away in a vast black limousine with electric darkened windows and Mr Ikeda's emblem emblazoned on the carpet in gold thread. Walkie-talkies between the vehicles of the motorcade to the hotel relayed further messages from our mysterious host. The scale of operation was soon made clear.

Two representatives from the English branch of Mr Ikeda's movement had accompanied us all the way from London and were scarcely to leave our side, together with a phalanx of interpreters, drivers and aides of all kinds. Mr Ikeda wishes you to feel entirely at home," and "Mr Ikeda wishes you to make every use of the hotel's services and 36 restaurants" came the messages at regular intervals, as we gazed down out of our fourteenth floor window on to the hotel garden -- full of waterfalls, bridges and carp squeezed, like everything in Tokyo between intersecting flyovers.

Several days passed before we were to meet our mysterious host, time in which we learned more about Mr Ikeda and his Soka Gakkai movement. One thing above all others was made clear: this was an organisation of immense wealth, power and political influence. One book on the sect declares that "no understanding of postwar Japan is complete without some knowledge of this religio-political movement." Its influence strikes deep into every aspect of Japanese life. Among its many publications is a newspaper with a circulation of over 4 million. It has the third largest political party in the country. It has membership of 10 million, still growing. It has a university with 7,000 students, schools an art gallery -- and more.

Mr Ikeda is the third leader of the movement since it started in the thirties. But it is under him that the thing has taken off and become so powerful. He is the relatively

uneducated son of a laver seller from Omori, who succeeded to the leadership at the age of 36, when he was head of the Young Men's Division of the Soka Gakkai. It is mainly a lower middle class movement, gathering up those uprooted from old communities, and binding them very tightly to its strong cell-structure.

Night and day, surrounded by his aides, we heard his name mentioned in tones of reverential awe. The head of the British section (an English retired businessman, told us that Ikeda was "A man who has made the revolution in himself." Others testified to the greatness of his writing, his mind, his poetry, his spirit, even his photography. (Later we caught a glimpse of his photographic methods when we watched as an aide handed him a loaded camera. He held it out at arm's length and clicked it randomly without bothering to look in the viewfinder.) He takes photographs with his mind, not with his eye," murmured an aide on enquiry.

The evening came when we were at last to meet him. The great black limousine pulled into the palatial headquarters. The doorway was flood-lit with camera lights, and there stood Mr and Mrs. Ikeda, surrounded by bowing aides and followers. Dazed and dazzled by this unexpected reception committee, we were lead up to him to shake the small, plump hand. There he stood a short, round man with slicked down hair, wearing a sharp Western suit. Camera bulbs flashed, movie cameras closed in, and we were carried away with the throng, past corridors of bowing girls dressed in white to an enormous room.

Vast white armchairs were arrayed in a huge square and we were ushered to a throne-like set of three chairs at the head of the room, one for each of us and one for Mr Ikeda. He speaks no English, so behind us sat his beautiful young interpreter who accompanies him around the world. She sat at a microphone, so all our words could be heard clearly echoing round the room by all the aides and followers, who had taken to their rows of armchairs in strict order of precedence.

We sat there awed, appalled, intimidated, while royal courtesies flowed. "I want you to feel absolutely at home this evening," said Mr. Ikeda as we felt about as far from home as it is possible to be. "Just enjoy yourselves on this very informal occasion," he said. What would a formal meeting have been like? We talked of the weather in London and Japan, the city, the sights -- desperate small talk, conducted in public for half an hour, balancing champagne glass and smoked salmon plate, while the aides round the room nodded solemnly. Our host's style of conversation was imperious and alarming -- he led and others followed. Any unexpected or unconventional remark was greeted with a stern fixed look in the eye, incomprehension, and a warning frostiness.

As we took it in turn to sally forth in this game of verbal royal tennis, we each had time to study the man. Worldly he seemed, down to the tip of his hand-made shoes, earthy almost, without a whiff of even artificial spirituality. Asked to hazard a guess at his occupation, few would have selected him as a religious figure. I have met many powerful men -- prime ministers, leaders of all kinds -- but I have never in my life met anyone who exuded such an aura of absolute power as Mr Ikeda. He seems like a man who for many years has had his every whim gratified, his every order obeyed, a man protected from contradiction or conflict. I am not easily frightened, but something in him struck a chill down the spine.

Dinner was an ordeal. We were ushered into the traditional Japanese dining room, where we sat at cushions on tatami mats at low tables, around our host. The cook crouched in the middle of the table, serving tempura from a vat of boiling oil. "No serious talk tonight. Only pleasure," Mr Ikeda ordained. Our hearts sank. That meant more excruciating small talk.

He turned eventually to reminiscences of my grandfather and their meeting in

London. I could hardly imagine the incongruity of this small stout ball of power clanking up the creaky lift to my grandfather's dark and sparse flat. I wondered what meals he had been served -- a slice of spam and a lettuce leaf being a typical meal there. "He was a very, very great man." Ikeda said, leaning towards me, and staring me in the eye. "The greatest scholar in the world!" I pondered on some irreverent family stories, but hastily tucked them away.

"It is my mission in life to see that his work is read by everyone. You will support me in this?" I could hardly say no. "You promise? I have your promise?" I felt uneasy at what exactly was expected of me. Then he suddenly mentioned the fact that there are in existence some more parts to the Toynbee/Ikeda Dialogue, as yet unpublished, which he would like to be able to publish soon. A part of our reason for this journey fell neatly into place. Later I was to find out more.

There was one sticky moment in the course of the meal. He asked us what we thought my grandfather's last word of warning to him had been as they parted. We racked our brains until, in desperation, my husband ill-advisedly answered, "Greed." An icy look passed across Mr Ikeda's ample features. He looked as if he might summon a squad of husky samurai to haul us away. I hastened to explain that Peter meant the greed of mankind, of course, as referred to frequently in the Dialogues -- man's grasping selfishness and so on. He looked not entirely mollified and the moment passed.

After dinner we returned to the room of the great armchairs, and lavish present-giving followed -- a giant doll and a calculator for Milly, pearls, a record album of the Toynbee/Ikeda Dialogue, a personally signed copy of the Toynbee/Ikeda book. At last the nerve-racking evening was over, our cheeks cracked from smiling, our minds drained of all ingenuity in small talk and pleasantries. We were swept away with the throng, back past the bowing girls in white and the movie cameras--and away off in the limousine.

Next day our photographs appeared on the front page of Ikeda's multi-million circulation daily, the Seikyo Press, with a record of our dinner table conversation. No-one told us it was on the record--but it didn't matter, since it was the words, mainly of Mr Ikeda, that went reported, and little of us beyond our presence as his audience.

We departed for a brief trip to Kyoto and Hiroshima, only to be greeted again by more bouquets, banquets, black limousines and local Soka Gakkai groups. Hiroshima is an uncomfortable place -- the shrine of Japan's post-war peace mission. "What do you think of Hiroshima? Have you a few words to say about Hiroshima?" we were asked continually. The exhibits shock and stun, but words fail. After the first blast of horror, something else creeps in. Here is a national shrine to Peace and Never Again, telling the story of the sunny day the bomb dropped out of a blue sky, telling the story of what the world did to Japan. But there is not a word, not a thought, not a hint of anything Japan might have done. Hiroshima was one of the main military bases from which went out the marauding forces to Burma, Singapore, China, Korea -- countries who still find it hard to link Japan and peace in the same breath. But Hiroshima is the shrine of Japan's innocence.

One night we were shown a film of Ikeda's triumphal tour round America, at massed rallies in stadiums from Dallas to San Diego. Formation teams of majorettes and baton twirlers spelled the words SOKA and PEACE in great waves of thousands of human bodies and Ikeda, spot-lit and mobbed by screaming fans, delivered his usual speeches on peace -- always peace. It is one of the Soka Gakkai's themes, peace in men's hearts, peace across the nations, the brotherhood of mankind and so on. The effect was somewhat spoiled when the stadium hushed reverently as a message from President Ronald Reagan himself was read out -- sending a sincere message of

goodwill, peace and greeting to the Soka Gakkai and Mr. Ikeda. The stadium burst out in delirious applause.

The Soka Gakkai takes its peace mission round the world, often accompanied by an exhibition of horrific photographs from Hiroshima, which is used as a powerful recruiting aid. What were they doing, we asked, preaching peace and accepting messages of support from Reagan in the same breath? "We do not think there is anything incompatible in voting for President Reagan and being a member of the Soka Gakkai." Ikeda's usually silent male secretary said. The English Soka Gakkai head hastened to add, "We believe every man can change, and when President Reagan sent us that message, it showed that he too is capable of change in his heart."

It was then, at yet another banquet in Hiroshima that we lost our temper. We told them what we felt about the Soka Gakkai and Mr Ikeda's style of leadership. Our hosts were horrified and tried to smooth it all over and pretend the words had never been uttered.

We asked for a proper, serious interview with Ikeda, but later we doubted if anyone had dared relay our comments or our request. The last time we saw him, not a flicker crossed his face to suggest that he had heard of our outburst, or our request. It was at Soka Gakkai's founder's day, with the same kind of mass rally of 6000 majorettes we had seen on the film, to the theme tunes of "Dallas" and "The Sound of Music." After the finale Ikeda took a lap of honour round the stadium, while carefully rehearsed groups of girls shrieking with adulation, peeled away towards him.

We didn't see him again but we reckoned his final gift showed that no-one had recounted our outburst to him. He sent us yet another silk-bound tome, in which there was no text, but only 296 huge full-page photographs of himself and his family -- a book of colossal narcissism.

What had the whole trip been for? By the time we left, it all became clear. We had been taken to be interviewed by newspapers and television -- Peter about international affairs, I about my grandfather. Each interview in which we appeared bound Ikeda and Arnold Toynbee closer together in the public eye. Ikeda was making a firm bid to become the chief official Toynbee friend and spokesman.

I had no idea of the extent of my grandfather's fame and importance in Japan. He was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, and his work is compulsory reading in all universities. As the prophet of the rise of the East and the decline of the West, he has long been a hero in Japan. There is a Toynbee Society, run by distinguished academics, some of whom knew my grandfather well for many years, and they print a quarterly journal.

My grandfather never met Ikeda on his visits to Japan. His old Japanese friends were clearly less than delighted with Ikeda's grandiose appropriation of his memories, on the basis of a handful of rather vague interviews in extreme old age.

Soka Gakkai is the most powerful of Japan's "New Religions" which have sprung up since the war, collecting together an uprooted urban people lacking an identity in a society that puts a high premium on belonging to groups. Soka Gakkai means Value-Creating Society, and is based on the teachings of a thirteenth century monk, Nichiren Shonin, a militant nationalist who promised worldly rewards to his followers. It is rigidly hierarchical, with no democratic elements, and absolute power in Ikeda's hands. It imposes few religious or moral duties, beyond chanting twice a day, but it expects a high degree of obedient social participation in its organisation.

When Ikeda founded the movement's political party, Komeito, there began to be some alarm as to how he would use this power. This alarm has lead the party to officially separate itself from Soka Gakkai, though all its leaders remain Gakkai members. The Komeito (Clean Government) Party is the third largest party in the

mysterious and labyrinthine shifting factions of Japanese politics.

It is called a centre party, but such labels mean little in a country where a huge consensus agreed broadly on defence and foreign relations, and approves the absence of a welfare state. With the same party in power for 25 years, it is the factions that count, and Komeito, Clean Government or not, has often helped Tanaka faction candidates, in exchange for Tanaka having helped them over a scandal.

To call Soka Gakkai and its Komeito party "fascist" is to misunderstand Japanese politics. Certainly the movement is run on rigid anti-democratic lines, demanding absolute obedience. It is partly nationalistic, but also highly Americanised in taste and culture.

But it is a supporter of the Peace Constitution and it is not in favour of Japan rearming. Politically, like most of the other parties, it is mostly in favour of being in power. Soka Gakkai has non-governmental organisation status at the United Nations, a fact used much by Ikeda, as it establishes them as a world-wide "peace movement" and helps to give Ikeda access to heads of states around the globe. At Soka Gakkai's founders' day, we found representatives of many foreign embassies, and the French Ambassador was the guest of honour. People who seek influence in Japan cannot afford to ignore Ikeda, and indeed his own books sport hundreds of pictures of himself meeting people like Edward Kennedy, John Galbraith, and Presidents from every continent.

As we were leaving, Ikeda's secretary took us aside and asked if we could help with the publication of a second batch of Ikeda/Toynbee Dialogues left over from the first book. There were, it appeared, problems with executors and rights. Also it was hinted that in Ikeda's forthcoming tour of Britain in June 1985, we might be of some assistance. Exactly what was unspecified, but the marker was put down.

Back in England, I telephoned a few people round the world who had been visited by Ikeda. There was a certain amount of discomfort at being asked, and an admission by several that they felt they had been drawn into endorsing him. A silken web is easily woven, a photograph taken, a brief polite conversation published as if it were some important encounter.

I talked to the Oxford University Press, my grandfather's publishers. They said they had firmly turned down the Toynbee/Ikeda Dialogues, which were being heavily promoted by Ikeda after my grandfather's death. It would have been better if they had stuck to that decision. But Ikeda succeeded in getting it published in New York and the OUP felt obliged to follow suit. In the file lies a later letter referring to the possibility of a second batch of dialogues being published.

A reply from OUP tells inquirers that the manuscript can now only be obtained with the permission of the literary executors. The papers are stored, unsorted, in the Bodleian library in Oxford. It emerged that even while we were in Japan, Ikeda's representatives had been making discreet calls to England about the Toynbee papers. That, in the end, I suspect, was the purpose of our trip -- but from the present firm attitude of the OUP, it is highly unlikely that further Toynbee/Ikeda material will appear.

I like to think that if my grandfather had not been so old or if he had met Ikeda in his own bizarre surroundings, he would not have lent himself to this process of endorsement. He was a frail man at the time, and by nature trusting. If our trip to Japan was intended to bind him yet more tightly to Ikeda, I hope the effect will have been the reverse

Appendix 3

Daisaku Ikeda's poem "Il futuro vittorioso di maestro e discepolo"
From Il Nuovo Rinascimento 227, 2001, jan 1, 4-7

settantesimo anniversario della soka gakkai **NT**

il futuro vittorioso di maestro e discepolo



Poema del presidente della SGI
Daisaku Ikeda composto in occasione del settantesimo anniversario della fondazione della Soka Gakkai.

Io ho un maestro:
Josei Toda.

Ho dato la mia vita intera
al mio maestro!
Per realizzare i suoi insegnamenti,
per perpetuare il nobile spirito
del maestro e del discepolo,
per superare e annientare
persecuzioni fuorvianti e meschine,
per l'unicità di maestro e discepolo,
per lasciare una storia di *kosen-rufu* di
gloria e di splendore eterni,
per vanificare le autorità arroganti
e i tre potenti nemici
che hanno inflitto dolore al mio maestro,
per il corretto insegnamento del
Buddismo,
per i miei compagni di fede, generosi e
impegnati,
per quei discepoli che lottano per
ampliare più che mai il cammino
verso il futuro eterno!

Abbiamo deciso fino in fondo,
abbiamo lottato fino in fondo,
eravamo pronti a morire per la nostra
causa
e siamo andati avanti nella battaglia.
Quali rimpianti potremmo avere?
Quali esitazioni?

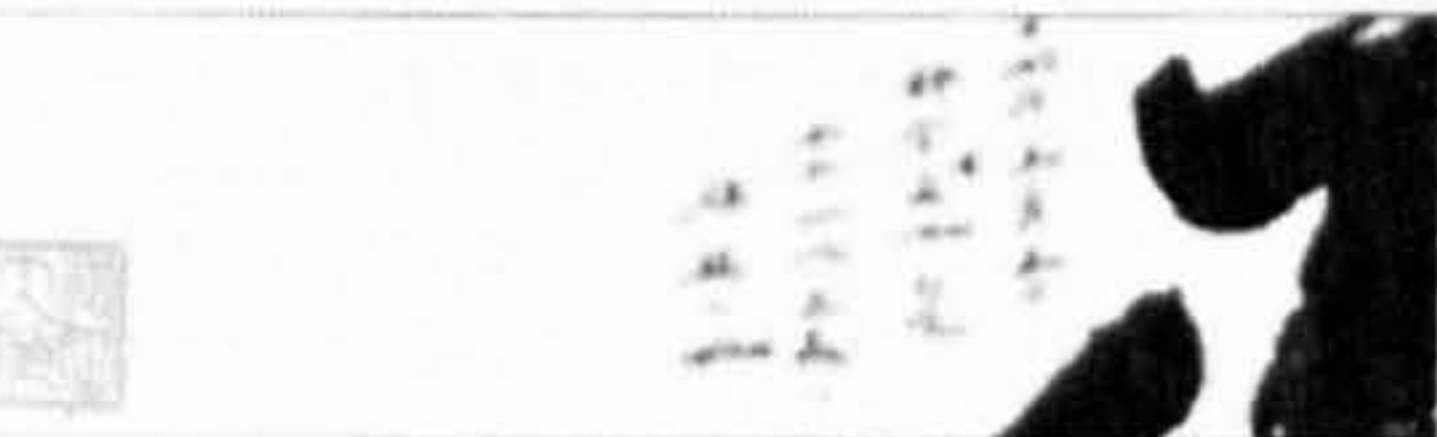
Questo è davvero
l'orgoglio dei discepoli
che continuano lo spirito
e l'opera
di Nichiren Daishonin.

Questo è il cammino solenne, costellato
di prove di maestro e discepolo
che insieme
ingaggiano con vigore
un'incessante battaglia per il bene,
seguendo la volontà e il decreto del
Budda.

Il mio maestro ci diceva:
non diventate sonnambuli dello spirito
dagli occhi vuoti!
Non diventate persone
con la mente chiusa e rigida,
incapaci di sognare!

Guardate sempre lontano nel futuro
e non perdetevi mai la scintilla interiore,
curatela ogni giorno,
salutando con un addio solenne
ogni giorno che passa.

Non vi arrendete!
Non siate sconfitti!
Amate le lotte e le sfide della vostra vita
così da non stancarvi mai!
Esaurirsi
è il segno della sconfitta spirituale,
e l'origine dei sospiri
di una vecchiaia stanca.



Con questo spirito,
non potete sperare di superare
i problemi molteplici che avrete davanti.

Dovete continuare a vivere,
con vitalità e forza!
Non percorrete la vita
inciampando miseramente ad ogni
intoppo!

Amici miei!
Anche se incontrate
chi vi deride
e vi tratta con arroganza,
ognuno di voi ha una missione
e dalla vostra vita emanano talenti e
valore.

Se dispiegate le ali e
puntate
alle più nobili altezze del mondo,
senza dubbio crescerete
fino a diventare una persona
che è apprezzata e lodata
da innumerevoli divinità celesti.

Il vostro spirito,
la vostra fede,
non possono essere spezzati mai,
neanche dal più feroce dei colpi;

non possono essere scossi mai,
neanche dalle più implacabili sferzate.

Per quanto crudelmente il vostro spirito
sia frustato e percosso,
voi rimanete imperterriti.
Solo i vostri occhi,
accesi di una fiamma appassionata,
brilleranno più intensi
e più belli.
Siete paladini della vita
che non hanno paura di niente.

Fate arrivare le persecuzioni!
Lasciate che le prove mi colpiscano!
Ho i mezzi per generare
speranza alta e potente.

So vedere
quelli che come demoni
si ammassano intorno a ciò che,
senza che loro lo sappiano,
è solo il ceppo dell'esecuzione.

Calpestano
il nobile spirito
del Daishonin



e sono ormai
pietosi ladri della Legge.
Come un rapace stormo di cavallette,
Nikken e i suoi intimi
hanno sfruttato e perseguitato
e addirittura complottato per distruggere
la Soka Gakkai,
un'organizzazione del valore più alto
che ha dato contributi senza paragoni
alla diffusione della Legge
e ha lavorato così duramente
per sostenere e proteggere il clero.

I loro atti malvagi
rimarranno per sempre nella storia
ed essi saranno severamente giudicati
secondo la legge di causa ed effetto:
Questa, io credo essere
la posizione irremovibile
del Daishonin.

Accadrà proprio come egli afferma
nello scritto *Le persecuzioni che
colpiscono il Budda*:
possono sembrare liberi dalla punizione
dapprima,
ma alla fine sono destinati a cadere.

I complotti e gli schemi di Nikken e dei
suoi accoliti,

che hanno tessuto una tela di bugie
meschine
e di offese maligne,
erano mirati ad abbatteci.

E invece
abbiamo continuato a splendere
come il sole del mattino!
Ci siamo alzati con orgoglio al richiamo
della sfida
e abbiamo cominciato la battaglia!

Anche Nichiren Daishonin
fu offeso come prete immorale,
e le sue lotte in mezzo alle persecuzioni
vanno oltre ogni descrizione.
Il nostro primo presidente, Makiguchi,
era solito ricordarci con severità
che al confronto
le persecuzioni che avremmo incontrato
sono davvero piccole e di poco conto.

Con tacita pazienza,
e la ferma risoluzione dimostrata dal
Budda
incisa nel cuore,
abbiamo ingaggiato una strenua lotta
per superare
ogni immaginabile
espressione di arroganza e di boria.

Non saremo sconfitti.
Siamo stufi
della petulante e ingiuriosa stupidità
di questi poveri di spirito.
Di fatto, il nostro
spirito
potente e appassionato
brucia più brillante che mai.

Coloro che sono
a volte frenetici,
a volte freddamente silenziosi,
a volte pieni di scuse,
alla fine lasceranno questo mondo
singhiozzando e tremando di paura.

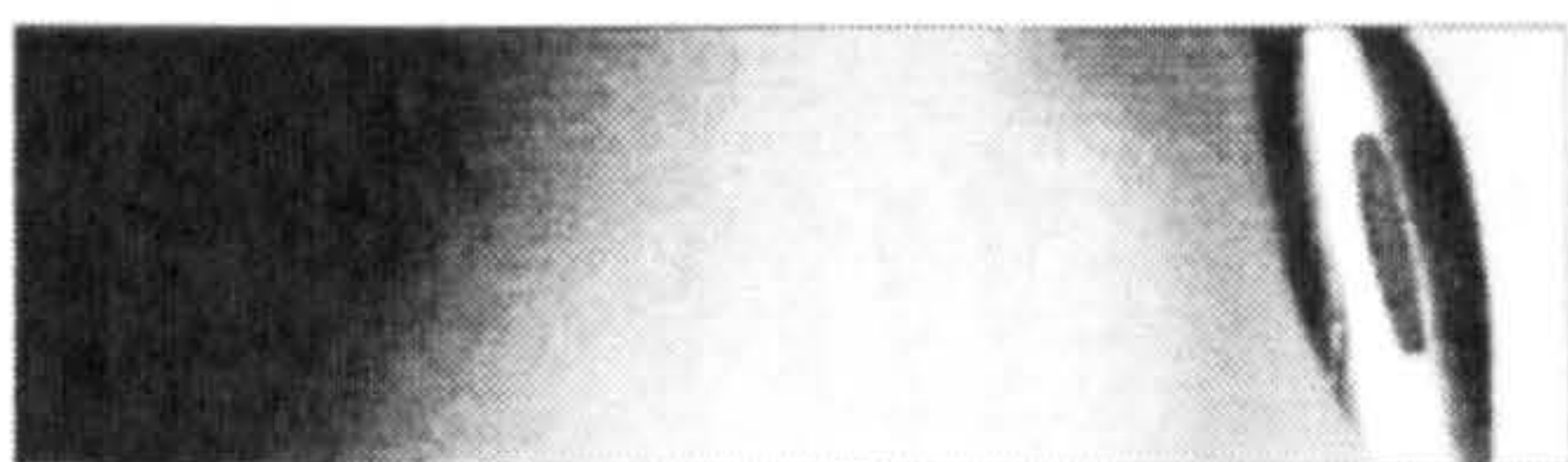
Apostati della fede!
Siete soddisfatti
di condurre un'esistenza
intrappolata nel labirinto
delle profondità infernali?

Calunniatori della Legge!
Dopo aver corrotto gli insegnamenti del
Daishonin
ed esservi allontanati dalla verità eterna,
siete preparati
a vagare per sempre in uno stato vitale
di agonizzante sconfitta?

Traditori!
Dopo aver voltato le spalle
alle parole auree del Daishonin,
siete pronti a bruciare nel fuoco



settantesimo anniversario della soka gakkai



dell'inferno della sofferenza incessante?
Ad essere imprigionati in una caverna
nell'inferno del freddo perenne?
Ad essere rinchiusi nel buio
dell'angoscia e del tormento,
privi per sempre della luce del sole?

La nostra fede e convinzione,
bruciando come fiamma,
modellata come raggio di sole
che fluisce giù dal cielo,
ha aperto gli occhi
di molti che ignoravano la verità,
ha portato la luce alle loro case oscure
e ha disciolto le parole bugiarde
delle pubblicazioni che ci diffamavano.

Illuminata dal sole,
illuminata dalla luna,
illuminata dalla grande anima
dell'umanità,
illuminata dallo spirito intransigente
della storia,
ignorando i lamenti meschini
di chi agisce contro la Legge,
alla fine l'alba
del trionfo dell'umanesimo
arriverà.

Abbiamo vinto!
Senza il minimo dubbio
la potenza del sole
che si leva sul nuovo secolo
non ha limite.

Abbiamo trionfato!
Oggi
la nostra coraggiosa alleanza Soka
di paladini della giustizia e della verità
si è diffusa in centosessantatré nazioni!

Amici miei!
Ancora una volta oggi,
come alleati del popolo forti e generosi,
con gioia, positivamente
gettiamoci a capofitto nella sfida
per combattere il male!
Apriamo un varco in ogni muraglia di
ostacoli!

O tempesta,
infuria se vuoi!
O onde potenti,
riversatevi su di noi con tutta la forza!

La nostra marcia,
la vostra e la mia,
una marcia di eroi senza nome,

può sembrare quieta e tranquilla,
ma i nostri cuori bruciano,
perché la spada ingioiellata della
giustizia e della verità
brilla nel profondo della nostra vita.

La nostra bandiera di gloria
sventola nel celebrare
il settantesimo anniversario
della fondazione della Gakkai.
La corona della vita
che ognuno di noi indossa
luccica più brillante che mai.

Lotteremo sempre per realizzare
la nostra solenne
e nobile impresa.

Questa nostra battaglia risuonerà
in eterno.
Un'impresa senza paragoni
che si diffonderà in lungo e in largo,
accrescendo sempre più
il suo splendore dorato.

Il Daishonin dichiarava:
Non siamo forse legati da una promessa
di essere maestro e discepolo
dal passato senza inizio?



Amici miei!
Vivete una vita
che brucia di una missione magnifica!
Amici miei!
Rifuggite una vita
diretta al patibolo della sofferenza!
Amici miei!
Chiamate a raccolta il coraggio!

Anch'io,
senza curarmi degli insulti che mi
piovono addosso,
sono deciso
a costruire
un monumento glorioso
di realizzazioni
nel profondo della mia vita.

Ah! Come sono incredibilmente
luminosi
i cieli del nostro futuro!

7 novembre 2000
Daisaku Ikeda
Poeta laureato

Appendix 4

Daisaku Ikeda's poem. English.

<<http://crazywriters.tribe.net/thread/2cc64f5b-9a92-46fa-84f0-6be194d455bf>>

SONOMA, Calif., May 18 /PRNewswire/ -- Fighting for Peace, a collection of poems by Buddhist philosopher Daisaku Ikeda (Dunhill Publishing), has been selected as one of three finalists for the Publishers Marketing Association's 2005 Benjamin Franklin Award in the poetry category. The winner will be announced at a ceremony in New York City on June 1.

Excerpt from a poem by Daisaku Ikeda Leader of Soka Gakkai International SGI
December 1, 2000 Soka Gakkai World Tribune

"The Victorious Future of Mentor and Disciple"

I can see
Those who are like demons
Milling around what,
Unbeknownst to them,
Is only an execution block.

They trample
The noble spirit
Of the Daishonin
And have become
Pitiful robbers of the Law.
Like a rapacious swarm of locusts,
Nikken and his cronies
Have exploited and persecuted
And even plotted to destroy
The Soka Gakkai,
An organization of the highest good
That has made unprecedented contributions
To spreading the Law
And worked so hard
To support and protect the priesthood.

Their evil deeds
Will go down forever in history
And they will be severely judged
According to the law of cause and effect.
This I believe
To be the unwavering position
Of the Daishonin.

It will be just as he states
In the writing "On Persecutions Befalling the Sage":

They "seem to be free from punishment at first,
 But eventually they are all doomed to fall"
 (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 997).

The plots and schemes of High Priest Nikken Abe and his cohorts,
 Spinning a web of the most base lies
 And vicious slander,
 Were designed to bring us down.

Yet
 We shone on brightly
 Like the morning sun!
 We rose boldly to the challenge,
 And began our battle!

The Daishonin, too,
 Was slandered as an immoral priest,
 And his struggles amid persecution
 Were beyond description.
 Our first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi
 Used to strictly remind us
 That in comparison
 The persecution we encounter
 Is truly small and trivial.

With silent forbearance,
 The firm resolve demonstrated by the Buddha
 Engraved in our hearts,
 We waged an arduous struggle
 To overcome
 Every imaginable
 Haughty and arrogant utterance.

We will not be defeated.
 We are fed up
 With the clamoring and abusive foolishness
 Of these spiritual paupers.
 In fact, our mighty, passionate spirit
 Only burns all the brighter.

They who are
 At times frenzied,
 At times coldly silent,
 At times filled with excuses,
 Will eventually depart this world,
 Gasping and trembling in fear.

Backsliders in faith!
 Are you satisfied
 To lead a life
 Trapped in a maze
 Of hellish depths?

Slanderers of the Law!
Having corrupted the Daishonin's teachings
And veered from the eternal truth,
Are you prepared
To drift along forever in a state of life
Of agonized defeat?

Traitors!
Having turned your backs
On the Daishonin's golden words,
Are you ready
To be burned in the fires
Of the hell of incessant suffering?
To be imprisoned in a cavern
In the hell of extreme cold?
To be shut off in the darkness
Of misery and strife,
Forever deprived of the sun's light?

Appendix 5

“Tentazioni di potere all’interno di un nuovo movimento religioso.

Il caso Soka Gakkai in Italia”

di Maria Immacolata Macioti

<http://www.scmc.it/ForumERM/Docs/docs_index.html>

La problematica

Davvero difficile tentare un’analisi, oggi, dell’IBISG, l’Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai. E’ infatti sempre complesso intervenire con prime analisi per individuare percorsi e direzioni in una realtà fluida, colta in una fase di profondi mutamenti e assestamenti. Tenterò comunque di avanzare alcune riflessioni in merito, poiché in Italia; questo tipo di buddhismo è sembrato non solo vincente su piano numerico, ma anche particolarmente interessante per l’apertura voluta e perseguita nei confronti di altri tipi di, buddhismo e per il confronto e l’impegno nel sociale, tanto da essere additato come esempio alle associazioni consorelle di altri paesi; una realtà che oggi appare attraversata da una crisi profonda che ne chiama in dubbio l’identità e l’appartenenza, oltre che le modalità organizzative.

Sempre i movimenti religiosi e spirituali vivono varie dinamiche, percorrendo di regola sentieri che vanno da un momento di esplosione a una fase di consolidamento, con rischi di burocratizzazione del carisma, come ha insegnato Max Weber, ma anche con rischi di autoritarismi e dogmatismi legati al consolidamento della leadership.

Non stupisce quindi che la Soka Gakkai italiana, che ha vissuto intorno agli ultimi decenni del 1900 una fase di forte spinta e di crescita, viva oggi al contrario una fase di involuzione, di contrazione del numero degli adepti (la meta dei 30.000 che pareva a portata di mano, si è andata via via allontanando, oggi si parla di circa 20.000 membri, ma sono cifre incerte, perché molti kaikan non inviano più le statistiche).

L’individuazione del nemico esterno

Scomparse le tendenze all’apertura e al confronto, sembra sian prevalse negli ultimi tempi una decisa chiusura e la segnalazione di un nemico da cui guardarsi: fatto anch’esso; in questi casi, tipico e ricorrente. In particolare il nemico è stato individuato in Nikken e in una setta che si supponeva togliesse membri alla S.G. (Danto)

Il sistema si fa più autoritario

Non solo. A forme di gestione più o meno democratica se ne sono sostituite altre decisamente autoritarie, rafforzate da un dogmatismo duramente dichiarato e applicato: non si può discutere l’indicazione di un responsabile, non è ammesso avere dubbi. Bisogna solo obbedire, e senza discutere.

I vecchi dirigenti vengono aggrediti e umiliati uno a uno. Il nuovo direttore generale e i suoi più stretti collaboratori dichiarano che si può togliere la responsabilità a chi “sta fermo”, a chi “intralcia il progresso di Kosen rufu”. Una sua frase fa il giro di tutta la SG:

«Da oggi è abolita dalla nostra organizzazione l'espressione "non sono d'accordo"¹» La nuova dirigenza chiarate ulteriormente, in svariate occasioni, la situazione: "Non vogliamo chi non segue la linea". Linea che si discosta sempre più da una corretta interpretazione del buddhismo.

Il nemico interno

Né si tratta di singole frasi pronunciate sporadicamente, da persone marginali è proprio una nuova linea che si intende imporre, chiaramente e con durezza. In questa ottica, le frange «deboli» del movimento, quelle che nei Nuovi Movimenti Religiosi sono l'asse portante, un motivo di orgoglio di regola proclamato ad alta voce, pubblicamente sbandierato, ormai sembrano essere divenute non già superflue ma decisamente controproducenti.

Laddove in genere ci si fa infatti un vanto di avere aiutato, di stare aiutando molti giovani a uscire da situazioni di droga, di confusione, di angoscia personale, a volte anche di avere aiutato il reinserimento di chi ha sperimentato il carcere, ora invece si applica una politica di dura riprovazione e rigetto.

A una gestione basata su una proclamata ricerca di felicità e amicizia si è venuta infatti sostituendo una gestione decisamente imprenditoriale, in cui non sembra esservi più posto per persone incerte, esitanti, per qualche verso non pienamente inserite nel sociale, non universalmente accettate. Tossicodipendenti, e omosessuali, ad esempio, non sono, in quest'ottica, persone a cui affidare responsabilità. La stigmatizzazione investe, oltre agli omosessuali, anche altre categorie «deboli».

La ricerca della felicità diventa ricerca di un successo inondano che non ha nulla a che vedere con quello colto a suo tempo da Weber nel protestantesimo, nulla a che fare con la «chiamata» religiosa. La svolta è decisamente autoritaria, affaristica, manipolatoria. La nuova leadership dichiara pubblicamente i propri intenti: bisogna raddrizzare la fede «storta» di molte persone. Vi sono, all'interno dell'IBISG, dei traditori: vanno allontanati.

Vengono indicati come «traditori» vecchi praticanti che, dubbiosi circa le ultime attività, ne hanno inviato notizia al presidente internazionale Ikeda. Uno di loro viene accusato in una seduta pubblica di far parte di un complotto contro presidente e direttore, e si insisterà a lungo, con minacce verbali e modi intimidatori, per far emergere gli inesistenti nomi degli aderenti al supposto complotto, con comportamenti più vicini all'operato di una squadraccia fascista

(si ricordino le descrizioni di Vasco Pratolini, in *Metello* e altrove) che non di un gruppo religioso o comunque di un accettabile tipo di associazionismo².

Si arriva a minacce personali: vi è chi viene pedinato, chi ha la casa sorvegliata. A qualcuno vengono letti i file presenti nel suo computer. Ad altri si fa sapere che l'esito di una difficile operazione cui il supposto traditore dovrà sottoporsi non potrà essere positivo: non interverranno a suo favore gli shoten zenjin: oggi si legge di pesanti, analoghe minacce con cui vengono trattate e terrorizzate donne nigeriane oggetto di tratta, acciocché lavorino nel campo della prostituzione, ripagando ad abundantiam il denaro investito su di loro (in questi casi, la minaccia riguarda riti voodoo).

Non solo: c'è chi utilizza notizie apprese in una relazione privata e privilegiata,

quella occorsa perché si è «chiesto guida»³, per gettare fango sul supposto nemico. Verità complesse del buddhismo, quali la legge di causa e effetto, vengono banalizzate al punto che, di fronte a

richieste di aiuto per problemi rilevanti, ci si sente rispondere da qualcuno di questi ritrovi responsabili: «karma tuo! E' la legge di causa-effetto!»

I diritti umani

Contemporaneamente, il movimento si presenta in pubblico come il difensore dei diritti umani (v. la Mostra sui diritti umani inaugurata dal Presidente Ciampi, la cui foto finisce immediatamente sulla stampa dell'IBISG; ma anche i richiami e gli appelli annuali del presidente internazionale Ikeda alla pace) mentre all'interno si instaura un regime che secondo molti membri impedisce invece un normale esercizio di diritti garantiti dalla Costituzione italiana ai suoi membri, che sono comunque cittadini italiani e come tali dovrebbero poter vivere esercitando fondamentali diritti all'autodeterminazione, alla tutela della privacy e così via.

Da difficoltà iniziali, quando si potevano individuare all'interno del movimento sporadici atti autoritari accanto a una gestione più pacata e tranquilla, si è passati nel giro di due anni a una gestione più determinata e più duramente autoritaria e impositiva.

Le reazioni

Molti membri per due anni hanno sofferto in silenzio, senza che nulla trapelasse al di fuori: un esempio notevole, a mio avviso, di coesione e di attaccamento a una visione positiva della Soka Gakkai come la si era conosciuta, come la si era interiorizzata, nonostante il suo evidente deterioramento.

Molti tra coloro che si sono visti attaccati inoltre hanno vissuto un noto processo di colpevolizzazione, si sono cioè chiesti se non fossero effettivamente in torto, visto che vari responsabili imputavano loro «storture» nella fede comportamenti non conformi. Si tratta di un processo ben esemplificato a suo tempo nel film *Il portiere di notte* che, in questo caso, ha portato molti membri a un progressivo ritirarsi nel privato, all'abbandono della pratica collettiva: si tratta di processi noti e consolidati, per cui ad esempio la responsabilità dell'essere in stato di indigenza viene attribuita a persone rese povere da una serie di meccanismi su cui non basino il minimo potere di intervento.

Forse, si dicono così in molti, siamo davvero carenti, non facciamo abbastanza. E' colpa nostra. Non si pensa, a lungo, a confrontarsi con altri, a esportare il disagio, a palesarlo all'esterno: per due anni non uscirà un rigo sui giornali, nessuno al di fuori dell'IBISG verrà messo a conoscenza di quanto accade. E', mi sembra, una evidente manifestazione del notevole attaccamento all'IBISG da parte di molte persone che, nonostante delusioni e maltrattamenti psicologici, resistono.

Trascorrono così circa due anni, in cui gli unici referenti cui viene espresso il disagio sono della SG. Lettere vengono mandate al presidente, che non risponde o lo fa in modo tale da lasciare cadere alcuni discorsi. Memoriali vengono spediti al presidente Ikeda, che però è lontano, sia fisicamente (vive in Giappone, viaggia molto) sia culturalmente. Passerà del tempo, prima che il Consiglio direttivo venga convocato, una, due, tre volte a Tokyo⁴.

Il malessere è però troppo diffuso, il disagio è ormai troppo evidente, acuito tra l'altro da quella che si avverte come una mancanza di chiarezza: su «Il Nuovo

Rinascimento» non è mai stata pubblicata la dichiarazione firmata a Tokyo dal direttivo, in cui si riconosceva che vi era stata una condotta autoritaria e si chiedevano scuse ai praticanti⁵.

Secondo alcuni, non sono neppure cessate le vessazioni, le violenze. psicologiche, le semplificazioni dottrinali che sfiorano il grottesco, nonostante le dichiarazioni e le riunioni di chiarimento che vi sono state tra alcuni membri del Consiglio Nazionale e vari membri della SG.

La dirigenza ha comunque, apparentemente, sottovalutato un aspetto oggi assolutamente rilevante e di prioritaria importanza: lo sviluppo di internet, l'uso dei messaggi telefonici. Le notizie oggi circolano rapidamente, si diffondono al di là della volontà dei singoli. E questo accade persino in tempo reale.

Il dissenso e i nuovi media: nasce «Tracce»

Nel marzo 2002, quindi dopo la firma della risoluzione di Tokyo, nasce così «Tracce», rete di autorganizzazione e confronto, che ha inizialmente la finalità di un ampio dibattito sulle religioni e la spiritualità intese in senso ampio: oggi vi sono iscritte circa 600 persone⁶ (i cosiddetti traccianti o traccianti) che leggono e inviano messaggi e-mail in cui si comunicano ansie, dubbi, paure. In cui si aprono dibattiti su qualche comportamento, su qualche frase del direttore e di altri. Gli accadimenti infatti premono talmente che il dibattito teorico, di cui pure vi sono abbondanti presenze, non è però dominante, perde spazio rispetto ai fatti interni. Il sito è un luogo di scambi di notizie: vi si danno i report delle più importanti riunioni, vi corrono e si diffondono gli ultimi «detti celebri» Sono presenti, inevitabilmente, aspetti ludici: ci si diverte con improvvisate poesie⁷, con alcuni quiz⁸, con spiritosi «insegnamenti» nei quali si prodiga il maestro Iton Kawasaki: un nome dalle numerose interpretazioni, di cui la più condivisa appare essere quella di «colui che arriva su una ruota sola». Sono certamente, quelli in cui si leggono i suoi gosho, momenti di distensione, oasi di serenità in un insieme di episodi sgradevoli e oscuri.

Il sito diviene un luogo di sfogo, di autoespressività, una palestra in cui stolti sono gli argomenti seriamente proposti, scherzosamente avanzati, umoralmente accennati. Vi è chi abbandona disgustato da toni frivoli, da dibattiti su cui non si concorda. E vi è chi subentra. La cifra degli iscritti, in totale, resta sempre intorno al mezzo migliaio.

Da «Tracce» deriveranno poi alcune filiazioni, tra cui «Percorsi2», fondato da un'ottantina di persone, per riprendere quel dibattito religioso più ampio che non è dominante in Tracce: e può darsi il caso di una doppia presenza di alcuni nei due siti.

Ancora, nasce verso il giugno 2002 «L'osteria Kawasaki», a partire da una trentina di persone che andranno, pur da chiare posizioni critiche, al corso estivo del 2002. Non tutto è sfogo, né la dura critica è fine a se stessa si affrontano infatti in queste sedi anche più impegnative tematiche. Quel che tuttavia è certo è che ormai vi sono centinaia di persone che si interessano, si informano, passano notizie. Nulla, apparentemente, sfugge alla diffusa ansia di comprendere: dal ruolo di un inviato dal Giappone⁹ al bilancio e alle sue voci, dalle somme spese per un centro che poi non si farà, nel Nord, alle ultime esternazioni fatte in qualche pubblica riunione.

Si va all'esterno

Dopo due anni di forte dolore e di dure difficoltà, alcuni avanzano inoltre l'idea di parlare della loro situazione al di fuori dell'IBISG. Poiché in passato mi sono

interessata della SG, dopo alcune esitazioni si decide di prendere contatti con me¹⁰. Mi giungono prima telefonate e materiali scritti, poi mi viene a trovare una delegazione composta da membri di varie città, nella primavera inoltrata del 2002. Ascolto storie di sofferenze inutili dovute ad alcuni improvvisati responsabili, di ansie e dubbi ma anche, ormai, di ribellione a imposizioni di tipo autoritario, di volontà di uscire da questa situazione, sostanzialmente e non sole formalmente: invano i dirigenti sono stati infatti chiamati a Tokyo, invano è stata fatta firmare a tutti una «risoluzione» in cui i leaders chiedono scusa ai membri per la gestione seguita negli ultimi due anni. Le scuse, dicono molti membri della IBISG, sono rimaste formali; poco o nulla, a loro parere, si è fatto per renderle reali e concrete, per operare nella direzione di un chiarimento e di un confronto. Invano anche io incontro alcuni del Consiglio Direttivo, partecipo a una loro riunione, suggerisco la pubblicazione sul «Nuovo Rinascimento».

L'Itai Doshin

Non si intende discutere in sedute allargate la situazione. Si pensa invece al contrario di andare verso un superamento delle difficoltà interne attraverso un forte richiamo all'unità buddhista, all'itai doshin¹¹, a prescindere da quanto è intercorso: e sembra a molti l'applicazione del vecchio detto: «ohi ha avuto ha avuto ha avuto, chi ha dato ha dato ha dato, scurdammoce o' passato...». Ma non tutti sono disposti a una «normalizzazione» che lascia ai loro posti i principali responsabili del degrado dell'Istituto, che lascia impregiudicati modi di gestione verticistici e autoritari.

Il ruolo del sociologo

Tento una quasi impossibile mediazione: parlo più volte con alcuni membri del consiglio direttivo nominato in Giappone e preposto alla normalizzazione, partecipo a una riunione del Consiglio, in cui però non si presentano i dirigenti maggiormente discussi: a mio avviso sarebbe importante pubblicare nei giornali del movimento la cosiddetta Risoluzione di Tokyo, anche se essa si è rivelata tutt'altro che risolutiva: sarebbe un gesto di assunzione di responsabilità, sarebbe un modo di rendere visibile un impegno al mutamento. Verso metà luglio la pubblicazione viene annunciata, sembra possibile: all'ultimo momento però viene bloccata da Presidente e Direttore generale¹². A tutt'oggi non è stata mai resa pubblica.

Convinta della necessità di un chiarimento della situazione, consapevole di aver concorso, con la pubblicazione de *Il Buddha* che è in noi, *Germogli del Sutra del Loto*, a dare un'immagine positiva di questa realtà (trovandomi in buona compagnia, dati gli scritti di Karel Dobbelaere e di Brian Wilson) ho ritenuto doveroso da parte mia anticipare su «La Critica Sociologica» (n. 141, Primavera 2002, uscito a fine luglio) alcune prime notizie, alcune brevi riflessioni in merito. Ho tentato quindi una rapida cronologia degli avvenimenti, dando voce ai membri che avevano subito soprusi ma anche citando editoriali di *Littera*, il direttore che è stato, detta di molti, uno dei principali protagonisti di questo processo involutivo.

Tutto questo anche perché credo di avere interiorizzato, nei lunghi anni di collaborazione con il prof. Franco Ferrarotti, un'impostazione di sociologia critica; tutto questo perché mi è ben presente anche la lezione della Scuola di Francoforte circa il potere e le modalità con cui va studiato discusso e possibilmente combattuto, se del caso.

Come non esiste la «naturalità» della famiglia così non reputo debba essere ipotizzata la naturalità della gestione del religioso. Come la famiglia può divenire il luogo in cui si insegna la naturalità del potere paterno, così il movimento religioso può indurre interiorizzazioni di ruoli autoritari che inducono dipendenza. E mi

sembra sia compito degli studiosi di questi fenomeni anche il denunciare abusi e deviazioni in questo senso. Abusi e deviazioni che hanno portato in casi ben noti, a conseguenze estreme, come nel caso del Tempio del Popolo di Jim Jones e altri e che danno corpo all'indicazione di Lewin Coser circa le «istituzioni avidi», quelle che tendono all'espropriazione della personalità dei membri, quelle che inducono un forte appiattimento delle individualità.

La Soka Gakkai nei primi anni 2000 intanto é infatti in Italia una realtà abbastanza bene accettata che gode di buona stampa, grazie agli sforzi di pr come Fiorella Oldoini, che vi ha profuso tempo e fatica, per anni, gratuitamente, oltre che grazie al lavoro di tanti altri. Il passaggio da movimento e istituzione, a suo tempo delineato da Francesco Alberoni, sembra bene avviato dopo un momento di grande difficoltà legato al passaggio da associazione laica a ente religioso¹³, dopo il superamento della lacerazione con la Nichiren Shoshu. Tanto che ora si tenta l'iter della Intesa con lo Stato italiano¹⁴. Una sempre più forte presenza su piano internazionale sembra un obiettivo possibile e vicino. In Italia la Soka ha già collaborato con il CIR, Consiglio Italiano Rifugiati, e con la Croce Rossa Internazionale. Un futuro importante sembra quanto mai probabile, così come vicina appare la meta dei 30.000 iscritti. Sennonché nel frattempo è mutata, come si é detto, la linea interna.

Le reazioni dopo la pubblicazione su «La Critica Sociologica»

Le reazioni al mio breve intervento, in cui si denunciava il clima di intimidazioni occorso, non si sono fatte attendere, nonostante fossimo ormai in piena estate: un'estate tra l'altro, in quel periodo, bollente e, per molti, faticosa. Come era logico attendersi, si sono immediatamente differenziate:

1. Il consenso

Le più numerose a me giunte sono state le lettere di caldi ringraziamenti: finalmente qualcuno aveva ascoltato il disagio, il malessere sempre più forte, aveva permesso che i soprusi subiti potessero emergere. C'è di che riprendere ad avere fiducia negli intellettuali.

2. Il dubbio

Altri si sono mostrati incerti: perché avevo a suo tempo scritto il libro? Perché adesso prendevo posizione? Forse prima o dopo, ero stata pagata? In Tracce corrono anche messaggi sconcertati, interrogativi di questo tenore: di fronte ai quali mi sono rallegrata di non essere neppure andata una volta in Giappone per incontrare il presidente Ikeda, come pure hanno fatto vari colleghi di alta nazionalità. Di avere condotto, anni addietro, la ricerca sulla SG

poi confluita nel n. de «La Critica Sociologica» e nella pubblicazione *Il Buddha che è in noi. Germogli del Sutra del Loto*, per curiosità e interesse: un privilegio che probabilmente resta uno dei pochissimi che ancora oggi caratterizzano la vita universitaria, quello di poter scegliere da sé, in piena autonomia, l'oggetto della propria ricerca, come per altro consigliava caldamente Herbert Blumer, noto teorico della corrente dell'interazionismo simbolico che si è molto occupato di ricerca sul campo, esortando appunto gli studiosi all'utilizzo dei metodi qualitativi e alla scelta di tematiche fatta in modo liberi e autonomo, cioè non finanziate da qualche committente dei cui desideri e opzioni sarà giocoforza tenere conto sia nell'impostazione che nella conduzione della ricerca, e quindi nella stesura del rapporto finale sulle risultanze ottenute.

3. La riprovazione

Numericamente meno numerosi ma comunque esistenti anche alcuni messaggi di

dissenso, che andavano da accuse di mancata «oggettività» e scientificità (accuse che sembravano ignorare totalmente il dibattito in merito alle scienze sociali e al mutato concetto di oggettività), espresse comunque in modo accettabile, a due lettere di insulti veri e propri, non senza errori logici ed ortografici. Lettere tuttavia, a mio giudizio, rilevanti anche queste perché mostravano come fosse avanzato il processo di identificazione per cui il buddhismo di Nichiren veniva di fatto ad essere visto come impersonato da Kaneda (presidente) e da Littera (direttore generale), figure che erano divenute più rilevanti del messaggio del Sutra del Loto e che eclissavano persino il presidente Ikeda.

4. Una possibile azione giudiziaria

Da parte di presidente e direttore si è avuta subito una velata minaccia di causa. Compare infatti in tutti i kaikan un avviso così formulato:

Visti i contenuti gravi ed oggettivamente lesivi dell'articolo a firma di M.I. Macioti apparso sulla rivista *Critica Sociologica*, il Presidente e il Direttore dell'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai si riservano di valutare ogni più opportuna iniziativa a tutela dell'immagine dell'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai e dei suoi esponenti.

Il comunicato è firmato, per l'ufficio stampa, da Ambra Nepi. Nulla invece sulla sostanza della questione, sui contenuti di quanto da me scritto. Immediata è stata comunque la reazione di molti membri, che hanno raccolto firme e hanno scritto dichiarando il loro accordo con quanto da me pubblicato, esortando i signori Kaneda e Littera a non fare causa a nome dell'associazione ma loro proprio. Il testo utilizzato, con minime variazioni, suona così:

Noi fedeli dell'Istituto Buddista Italiano dopo aver letto l'articolo di cui sopra riteniamo che riferisca fatti realmente accaduti nel corso di questi ultimi due anni, e ricordiamo che proprio di tali fatti il Presidente stesso ha chiesto, in più occasioni, pubblicamente scusa. Pertanto invitiamo cortesemente il Presidente e il Direttore a prendere qualsiasi iniziativa solo a titolo strettamente personale e non a nome dell'IBISG, in quanto non ci riconosciamo nelle presunte azioni che intendono intraprendere.

Credo che queste e analoghe dichiarazioni¹⁵ siano state così numerose (inviate in gran parte anche me per conoscenza, e a quanto mi risulta anche al presidente internazionale Daisaku Ikeda) da indurre cautela, tanto che l'avviso a firma Ambra Nepi comparso in tutti i kaikan veniva rapidamente ritirato credo sta la prima volta che si verifichi ai nostri giorni una così forte protezione da parte dei membri di un'associazione nei confronti di uno studioso di movimenti religiosi.

La normalizzazione: prima tappa, il corso estivo a Montecatini, 2002

In queste polemiche trascorre intanto l'estate e si avvia al suo compimento un agosto agitato, in cui sono circolate anche fantasiose notizie circa una sospensione nell'itinerario dell'Intesa dovuta, secondo il presidente Kaneda, al mio diretto intervento: per scritto, grazie a «*La Critica Sociologica*», e a voce, visto che sarei andata a parlare negativamente con enti vari e, naturalmente, al Ministero dell'Interno: notizie date pubblicamente dal signor Kaneda nel corso estivo di fine agosto¹⁶.

E' lo stesso corso estivo che vede la presenza del signor Kitano: inviato già da qualche tempo in Italia, probabilmente per comprendere e sedare la situazione, anche perché in Giappone, tra le tante, è giunta anche una allarmata lettera di Karel Dobbelaere, autore di svariati studi sulla Soka Gakkai, docente conosciuto anche per il suo lavoro con il prof. Bryan Wilson¹⁷ e molto stimato dal presidente

internazionale Ikeda. Kitano promuove fortemente il concetto di solidarietà buddhista, sia in una serie di riunioni, sia al corso estivo: rilancia con forza il tema dell'importanza dello studio del Gosho (che si può leggere in tutto il mondo grazie alla SG), in cui vi è la soluzione di tutti i problemi. Il modello della pratica è in Nichiren, e un'altra importante figura di riferimento che i devoti devono tenere presente è quella del Bodhisattva Fukyo, il Bodhisattva Mai Sprezzante: bisogna che emerga la convinzione che in ogni essere umano c'è la Buddità¹⁸, c'è la compassione (quindi, anche nel presidente e nel direttore, il cui operato non va discusso). Tutti insieme; si potrà rafforzare la solidarietà buddhista, l'Itai Doshin.

Gli interventi del signor Kitano sono recepiti da alcuni con sollievo, da altri con evidente fastidio e irritazione: vengono in questo caso interpretati come rivolti alla normalizzazione della situazione, senza che vi sia stato un momento preliminare di chiarimento, senza che si sia fatta chiarezza.

Si è inoltre sottovalutata, credo, l'epoca in cui viviamo. Sappiamo tutti che con la modernizzazione e con l'avvento dei media i tempi sono ormai molto accelerati, che le notizie circolano, si moltiplicano in fretta. In internet arrivano resoconti, commenti, vengono espressi stati d'animo molto diversi. C'è chi annuncia:

Prosegue la tournée del famoso artista giapponese Kitano. Previsto il solked-out ed anche un discreto pieno nello spazi antistante il luogo dello show causa mancanza di posti. L'artista giapponese non ha ancora dato notizia della scaletta dei brani ma dopo l'esecuzione dei pezzi dal nuovo CD "Everyone's Buddha, who can deny?", "All together now", "Don' harass the person beside me", "Straight wire" e "Who slolen my rollpapers?" si spera in qualche inedito e nella cover dei Depeche Mode "Masters and servants".

Si moltiplicano gli interrogativi irrisolti: perché non vi è trasparenza e le notizie vengono occultate? Perché si devono apprendere fatti riguardanti tutti i membri dall'esterno? Perché non c'è un bilancio pubblico? Quanto pesa il modo di pensare giapponese, in cui si era abituati storicamente alla lealtà verso l'autorità, alla accettazione piena verso il volere dell'imperatore, discendente dalla dea Amaterasu, nella attuale condizione della SG?

Si moltiplicano i messaggi irritati, delusi, irridenti, in cui in cui ormai i chiamati in causa direttamente "il Gatto e la Volpe", ne viene risparmiato il «sor Gaetano»: Cari compagni d'armi spuntate... Saremo pure buddisti e rispetteremo la buddhità di tutti, ivi compresi Nikken, Saddam Hussein, George Bush, Sharon, e Bettino buonanima... Rispettare la buddità insita in ogni persona non equivale a desiderare di vederla ancora, dopo tanti errori, al potere. Non giudicate, giudicherà la legge?!? Ma mi faccia il piacere ...A TUTTI, COMPRESI QUELLI CHE ENTRANO SU TRACCE PER PREVENIRE E CONTROLLARE MEGLIO il "NEMICO", ai falchi, alle colombe, ai falchi travestiti da colombe e alle colombe travestite da falchi, io dico: il giudizio è una facoltà intellettuale umana, quindi NON FACCIAMOCI LOBOTOMIZZARE DI NUOVO!!! Capisco bene il nobile intento del sig. Kitano, che poi si può riassumere in un detto famoso: "salvare capra e cavoli".... Le dimissioni di Kaneda o del suo braccio destro maldestro sembrano troppo umilianti per uno che si è sforzato tanto per kosen rufu? Ma non ci hanno rotto le palle per decenni sul fatto che non bisogna essere attaccati alla responsabilità? La situazione è delicatissima, se no non sarebbe intervenuto Kitano, però occorre che qualcuno gli spieghi bene che qui siamo in Italia, non abbiamo il mito del capufficio, e abbiamo avuto Mussolini e Tangentopoli, per cui, o sicché, per dirla alla toscana, se uno qualsiasi dei personaggi del duo "Il Gatto e la Volpe" si ripresenta alle platee, sia ben chiaro che l'istinto di prenderlo a pernacchie è (e sarà) alto, per cui, dove sta mai la

rappresentatività, il ruolo del leader? Loro, a mio avviso, se lo sono giocato per un bel po' di tempo (vedi Bettino e compagnia cantante). Littera ha parlato e agito troppo e troppo a sproposito, deviando catastroficamente dai principi buddisti e spacciando le sue idee per principi buddisti e non è necessaria la Legge per giudicarli...

In molti deplorano l'andamento di riunioni in cui non è possibile porre domande, o in cui gli interrogativi vengono elusi. Sono stanchi di monologhi. Non intendono incoraggiare l'andamento attuale, che ai loro occhi consisterebbe nel METTERE PEZZE, aggirando o affossando addirittura il problema col discorso della fede e del seguire il pres. Ikeda ciecamente. Anche chi fa dei report molto ponderati, molto sofferti, esprime tuttavia un forte disagio.

E' molto doloroso per me parlare o scrivere del Corso di Montecatini. Infatti mi rendo conto che le mie parole potrebbero risultare fastidiose e deprimenti per molti che da questo Corso sono stati rigenerati. Io, invece, non sono stato fulminato sulla via di Damasco da Kitano, non sono tornato da Montecassino rassicurato e pieno di entusiasmo non è rinato in me il desiderio di buttarmi anima e corpo nell'attività buddhista per collaborare alla "ripartenza" (che non è un piatto casareccio valdostano ma lo slogan e la decisione proposta al Corso...

Segue un equilibrato resoconto, in cui si sottolinea tra l'altro come Kitano, per riconfermare la "reinvestitura" di Kaneda, abbia detto di essere stato colpito dal calore degli applausi che lo avevano accolto: eppure un terzo della sala era restato in silenzio. E i dissidenti non erano stati ammessi al corso. L'unico ruolo riservato agli astanti è stato quello di un passivo ascolto, laddove lo slogan del corso recitava: 2002 anno dell'espansione del dialogo. Le poche obiezioni vengono espresse da persone prive di microfono, che devono gridare per farsi ascoltare: e subito vengono viste come esagitate, in preda a emotività eccessiva. La reazione è del resto dura: l'inviato della Soka Gakkai internazionale dice che non intende dare ragione a nessuno dei due gruppi, che avevano fatto gli stessi errori (?!). Non solo: sottolinea la gravità della «retribuzioni», delle conseguenze o effetti (nel caso citato, pustole purulente su tutto il corpo) per chi è arrogante, parla male dei praticanti e non ascolta il maestro: ...insomma, una doccia gelata per chi sperava di potere esprimere le proprie opinioni.... Nel complesso, ... mi sembra che il dialogo tra i diversi livelli gerarchici della SG sia ancora un optional che va conquistato ogni volta sbraitando e scalmanandosi.

Poco dialogo, quindi ed è una prima «ombra». Ma ce n'è una seconda:

La seconda ombra è che Kaneda e Lettera non sembrano cambiati. Kaneda si è arrampicato sugli specchi per cercare senza successo di giustificare il suo comportamento (in particolare in relazione all'intesa), e continua a parlare come se si credesse l'unico che sa veramente come proteggere l'organizzazione e il maestro Littera... si è detto orgoglioso di essere finito su "un libro sociologo". Mi fermo qui perché mi sto già ricoprendo di pustole purulente. L'Itai doshin predicato da Kitano non persuade tutti, non persuade chi si interroga sulle sue basi: a partire da cosa? Una unità buddhista basata sugli insegnamenti di Shakyamuni (in fin dei conti, il Sutra del Loto si suppone sia un suo insegnamento) o invece sugli insegnamenti dei signori Kaneda e Littera? Il richiamo all'unità non sembra sedare i problemi. Non impedisce, non può impedire che si eserciti la facoltà critica, tipica del pensiero.

Anzi, cosa mai avvenuta in precedenza, si comincia persino a discutere del ruolo del presidente internazionale Ikeda, che invia messaggi in cui si rallegra per lo sviluppo

numerico del movimento, invece di preoccuparsi di quanto è accaduto per mano dei suoi dirigenti. Che non fa un cenno alle vessazioni e alle violazioni dei diritti umani subite da vari membri. E' invece un presidente che raccoglie innumerevoli onorificenze e con le sue immagini trionfalistiche riempie le pagine della rivista internazionale. Sarà al corrente degli avvenimenti intercorsi? Avrà contezza di quanto è avvenuto? O è forse oggi troppo anziano, tenuto all'oscuro da chi lo attornia e che, sempre magari proponendosi il bene del maestro, quello della Soka Gakkai, gli passa solo notizie rosee o quanto meno edulcorate? Deve essere così, se in una situazione di così grave e diffuso disagio egli invia, invece di un intervento chiaro ed esplicito per la pubblicazione sulla stampa dell'IBISG, un suo lungo e in termini letterari discutibile e lirico poema.

Si 'tratta di interrogativi inquietanti, cui è difficile dare una precisa risposta, ombre che fanno da contrappunto alle luci che pure vi sono state.

L'Intesa con lo Stato Italiano

Particolarmente fastidiosa appare ai più avvertiti la questione dell'Intesa sospesa, sembra, dal presidente, riproposta al corso estivo, dove si dice che comunque deve prevalere su tutto la solidarietà buddhista, e che, essendo essenziale e dominante l'istanza della felicità dei membri, l'Intesa può attendere anche anni, se necessario. Queste dichiarazioni sono del 1° settembre del 2002: il 4 viene comunicato che l'Intesa ha ripreso il suo iter. Chi ha ascoltato il signor Kaneda al corso estivo non può non porsi interrogativi: perché parlare di anni di attesa, se si è già deciso di andare avanti? Chi non ha seguito queste tortuose vicende invece si interroga sconcertato quando nei kaikan appare un ulteriore messaggio che spiega che è stato ripristinato l'iter per l'Intesa. Quando si era deciso di sospenderlo e perché¹⁹? Colpa della cattiva Macioti²⁰? Ma sembra che la sospensione, motivata dal signor Kaneda con lettere giunte al Ministero dell'Interno, lettere mai pervenute, probabilmente mai scritte, sia stata decisa a suo tempo dal presidente, forse con pochi altri: lo stesso comportamento poi ripetuto per il ripristino.

Esaspera i più attenti tra i membri l'incertezza, la confusione delle notizie, i (voluti?) fraintendimenti, le accuse ingiustificate, l'avanzare una linea mentre già era stato evidentemente deciso che sarebbe stata disattesa.

Anche qui, due fattori concorrono a mettere in crisi la credibilità del presidente Kaneda: per sua sfortuna, mentre nel corso estivo annuncia di aver dovuto ritirare la proposta di Intesa con lo Stato italiano a causa di una supposta mia azione contraria, a causa di lettere contrarie dei membri, tra gli astanti vi è chi lavora proprio in quel settore al Ministero dell'Interno e, stupito, si alza contraddicendo rispettosamente il presidente. Inoltre, ancora si sottovaluta la circolazione delle notizie, la rapidità dell'informazione: in breve tempo giungono una serie di autorevoli conferme: nessuno ha mai preso contatti con il Ministero dell'Interno né ha parlato contro l'Intesa. E' vero invece che un circoscritto gruppo di dirigenti, quattro giorni dopo il corso estivo, aveva già deciso di riprendere, come nulla fosse intercorso, questo iter (in questo caso, non si è applicato il principio della unanimità del Consiglio Direttivo).

I commenti esacerbati di alcuni membri rivanno al messaggio trasmesso al corso estivo: è più importante la solidarietà buddhista dell'Intesa. Siamo disposti ad aspettare, anche anni! In sintesi, su Tracce circola questo commento:

“Complimenti per la sceneggiata!”

Il presente: rivedete lo Statuto?

Mi è occorso più volte, in questi ultimi tempi, di spostarmi per lavoro e di incontrare quindi, casualmente, alcuni membri della SG. Per lo più, scoraggiati. Non sembra infatti a molti di loro che si vada verso un reale, sincero ripensamento. Temono la normalizzazione, la coperta calda che tutto occulta e seppellisce. Si parla di abbandonare la SG, circolano leggende sul sollievo che questo provocherebbe in certi attuali dirigenti. Un'intervista a Roberto Minganti, uscita su «Confronti»²¹ sembra confermare questa volontà di normalizzazione, poiché il dirigente buddhista, direttore della rivista «Buddismo e Società», membro del Consiglio nazionale dell'IBISG dice:

Siamo stati tutti ugualmente responsabili. Per noi non c'è una persona specifica che ha avuto una funzione negativa e che è responsabile di tutto, responsabili sono anche le persone attorno che pur non essendo d'accordo sono state zitte.

La nostra è una responsabilità globale. Al nostro interno, l'unico strumento che abbiamo e che ci siamo riconfermati essere- valido è che di fronte a questo autoritarismo, ognuno di noi si deve alzare e deve bloccarlo con forza. Questa mancanza è stata la nostra debolezza che probabilmente aveva delle radici nel passato ma, non essendo successa mai una cosa del genere, questo punto debole non era mai stato evidenziato. Siamo deboli, poco coraggiosi, passivi di fronte ad una chiara elusione di quello che è l'insegnamento buddhista.

Il dire: "siamo tutti colpevoli" significa anche: nessuno è colpevole. E' vero però che Minganti riconosce pubblicamente che si è palesata una forte tendenza autoritaria nel movimento, che vi è stata sofferenza. Anzi, le sue ammissioni sono precise:

E' successo che c'è stata all'interno della nostra comunità religiosa una tendenza autoritaria che ha portato alla sofferenza di tantissimi membri della stessa comunità. Tendenza di cui noi, vertici dell'Istituto, ci siamo accorti e l'abbiamo capita solo nel tempo. Prima di tutti hanno capito i nostri membri che l'hanno vissuta sulla loro pelle... il sistema autoritario che si è venuto a creare ha provocato la sofferenza di un gran numero di persone. Non vogliamo in alcun modo trascurare questa sofferenza... (si è avuto) un sistema che abbiamo chiamato autoritario perché non era solo un modo per mettere a tacere il dissenso, c'è stato anche un certo uso del linguaggio e soprattutto si è scambiata l'organizzazione come un fine... Nella vita quotidiana della nostra comunità si è verificato uno schiacciamento delle differenze, volendo fare una società perfetta o etica, sono stati -pian piano allontanati tutti quelli che non corrispondevano a questo modello... Forse abbiamo manifestato in quel periodo una sorta di fondamentalismo buddhista che può esistere in ognuno di noi ... il livello delle minacce e offese è stato fermato.

Ammissioni, si diceva, chiare e gravi, che confermano autorevolmente quanto scritto dai membri, quanto da me a suo tempo riportato e che fanno onore all'onestà di Minganti.

Certo lasciano aperto il problema del domani, non risolvono completamente i dubbi di molti che temono si tenti di passare una sorta di spugna sul passato. Non garantiscono, di per sé, un cambiamento di rotta radicale, tale da rendere impossibili, per il futuro, rigurgiti analoghi. Restano quindi alcune posizioni differenziate, resta in molti un profondo scoramento, poiché per ora Minganti è stato l'unico dei dirigenti che, sia pure con un discorso non sempre lineare, ha pubblicamente e per scritto ammesso il regime autoritario intercorso.

La «cura Kitano» non sembra avere estirpato il male: al più, sembra avere agito su qualche sintomo. Ci sono stati veri cambiamenti?

Non tutti sono convinti della dichiarata volontà di cambiamento: tanto più che nel consiglio direttivo siedono alcuni membri cui è imputabile il degrado degli ultimi anni. Tanto più che Mitsuhiro Kaneda, un tempo amato presidente, durante il corso estivo ha perso pubblicamente ogni residua credibilità; tanto più che Giovanni Littera in corsi autunnali a Fano e nelle vicinanze ha continuato ad utilizzare il solito linguaggio. Solo che, invece di «fede storta», si parla ora di gente «difettosa». E di nuovo i messaggi corrono in rete, portano con sé stupore, irritazione, sconcerto:

Leggo su Tracce che il signor G. dice: "chi ha problemi con la S.G. è difettoso, siamo noi difettosi non la S.G., chi vuole cambiare la S.G. è difettoso" Stavo giusto aspettando una delle uscite del nostro jolly, bisogna ammetterlo: uno così ragazzi è da fare presidente del consiglio. Lui in realtà credeva di essere nella pasticceria, un bigné s'è riempito troppo di crema e allora la sua mente persa non è mica la macchina che ha esagerato, è il bigné che è "difettoso". Ma vi rendete conto che uno che usa un linguaggio come questo è direttore di una organizzazione di quasi 30.000 membri?

Le accuse di autoritarismo mosse da molti, riprese dalla Macioti?

Io non la conosco, non mi ha mai interpellato, non fa parte del movimento di Kosen rufu e quindi non mi interessa. Del resto, aggiunge il direttore, non ci sono oggi problemi nell'organizzazione: i problemi che ci sono ora non riguardano le persone, non è un problema tra Tizio e Caio ma è solo l'azione del demone.

Del resto, ...Quando vedremo chiaro nella nostra vita vedremo com'è bella l'organizzazione.

Le repliche al resoconto, alle frasi del direttore corrono veloci in internet. C'è chi si interroga sul senso di alcune frasi: forse voleva dire che il fine giustifica i mezzi? Altri vi leggono esortazioni a farsi i fatti propri. C'è chi rileva che la frase sull'estraneità della Macioti da kosen rufu, con lo scarso interesse per la sua persona che ne consegue è un indicatore di come l'IBISG guardi al resto dell'universo: Non so che ne pensate voi, ma è la frase più grave che sabbia detto.

Si discute ormai della correttezza o meno, in termini buddhisti, di certe affermazioni. C'è chi così interviene:

Dalla RdT appare chiaramente la deviazione dottrinale, Kitano ha chiaramente detto che dire "segui me" è sbagliato. Giovanni Littera, a Fano dice che chi vuole cambiare la Gakkai è difettoso. E' molto chiaro che lui con questa modalità esprime non un punto di vista, ma un dato di fatto, come se ciò che dice corrispondesse a verità assoluta, ovvero sta continuando a dire "segui me". Inoltre il termine difettoso si usa per un sistema meccanico, una lavatrice è difettosa non un essere umano. Se parli ad una platea come rappresentante legale di una associazione non ti puoi permettere di dire certe cose, il fatto che lui abbia una scarsissima considerazione dei membri o che sia semplicemente stato un lapsus (cosa di cui dubito), non conta... Trovo questo modo di fare violento, una grave violenza psicologica esercitata sulle persone, non ti piace qualcosa che IO ho contribuito a fare? Allora sei DIFETTOSO. Inoltre identificare la Soka Gakkai con i loro "deliri", è continuare esattamente come prima della RdT.

Nessuno, nella Soka Gakkai, discute gli insegnamenti basilari di Nichiren. Se qualche mutamento è auspicato, questo riguarda il cambiare degli aspetti DEMENZIALI della Gakkai Italiana, in accordo con le peculiarità degli italiani. La

Macioti ha scritto un'analisi lucida su di noi, questi comportamenti (passata la festa (Kitano) gabbato lo santo), non fanno altro che confermare ciò che la Macioti ha scritto. Non può una persona qualunque, quale è Littera, affermare dei principi assoluti, e dire che chi non la pensa così è sbagliato, qui c'è il seme di tutto ciò che il buddismo non è.

Altri insegnamenti dati a un meeting di giovani a Modena suscitano reazioni allarmate:

...a un meeting giovani tenutosi un mese fa a Modena è stato detto questo: "come state?" "Bene!" La risposta: "Allora se state bene vuol dire che non praticate correttamente!" Io credo che simili affermazioni siano la base di preparazione per i giovani per fargli accettare la sofferenza, anzi a legittimare la sofferenza e secondo voi da dove pioveranno le sofferenze? Non credete che sia un messaggio sottile per far tacere fin dall'inizio questi poveri giovani, nonché fargli capire che tutte le sofferenze che provoca il fare attività, è sano?... Quello che mi sconvolge è che questi signori pensino di rimanere impuniti, e non parlo solo della legge mistica. Non sarà così, ne sono certa.

E' evidente che non si sono fatti sostanziali mutamenti, nonostante il fervore dopo Montecatini, nonostante le speranze suscitate dalla presenza di Kitano. Il nuovo tour di Kitano ... ai miei occhi non ha aggiunto né levato nulla ai miei dubbi e alle mie perplessità. Ha solo confermato quello che avevo già capito benissimo a Montecatini. Nella Soka, i panni sporchi si lavano in famiglia, e per famiglia, in questo caso, si intendono sole le "altissime" sfere. Gli altri devono fidarsi che tutto andrà per il meglio, che i dirigenti troveranno la soluzione giusta, e continuare a praticare e a fare attività gioiosi e con il sorriso sulle labbra, senza mai far vacillare la convinzione di far parte dell'organizzazione più meravigliosa del mondo. Più o meno ormai si fa finta che non sia successo quasi nulla, si cerca di andare avanti minimizzando il disastro (che c'è stato)...

E' vero che sembra si siano fermati i fatti più gravi, che si stiano evitando i comportamenti più autoritari e invasivi che hanno caratterizzato soprattutto gli anni 2000 e 2001. Non tutti però sono disponibili a continuare a coprire quanto accaduto, a stendere un velo su episodi molto gravi. Nel frattempo infatti i rapporti tra molti membri si sono consolidati, gli scambi di opinioni si sono moltiplicati: la rete ha permesso scambi di opinione tra più persone, ha fatto comprendere che si possono verificare alcune affermazioni dei vertici, che le opinioni dei responsabili non sono indiscutibili. Tracce, in questo senso, ha svolto certamente un'opera di democraticizzazione. Né, come si è accennato, si tratta di una unica e sola realtà: i luoghi di confronto si sono accresciuti, il dibattito è oggi più ampio, ha trovato anche altri sbocchi.

Desideri di collegialità

Il cosiddetto «dissenso» si compone infatti di più realtà. E', ad oggi, un movimento composto da varie correnti, da diverse proposte operative, da diverse anime. Vi è chi è scoraggiato e parla di lasciare una realtà al cui interno si è troppo sofferto (e la finalità proposta, esplicitata era il raggiungimento della felicità!), vi è chi vuole credere che il peggio è oggi passato, vi è chi si impegna perché le cose cambino radicalmente.

Tra gli altri, il gruppo Adua-Montecatini²², sorto appunto in margine al corso estivo. Un gruppo che non intende affatto abbandonare il campo, che giudica che molte delle difficoltà attuali derivino da uno statuto mai discusso, calato a suo tempo

dall'alto²³. Che propone quindi una riflessione in merito, che vuole aprire un dibattito, portare all'attenzione del Consiglio Nazionale alcune precise proposte. Come vari altri membri e gruppi hanno fatto, anche il gruppo Adua-Montecatini propone al Consiglio Nazionale riflessioni sullo Statuto: in un documento intitolato Principi ispiratori, inviato il 30 settembre 2002. La risposta del Consiglio Nazionale, che sembra positiva, lascia ben sperare.

Ma ormai le richieste dei membri si moltiplicano: si vorrebbe prendere visione delle bozze dell'Intesa; si desidererebbe avere risposte ai tanti interrogativi sorti intorno alla gestione economico-finanziaria²⁴. Si chiede, comunque, trasparenza. Trasparenza e democrazia: richieste normali, in un diverso contesto. Qui, richieste che andranno sostenute da un largo movimento di opinione se non si vorrà vederle cadere nel vuoto.

Un sistema piramidale

Al di là degli sbocchi immediati, credo che quanto è accaduto meriti più ponderate analisi. E' evidente infatti, ai miei occhi, che il degrado degli ultimi anni non può essere imputato solo a poche persone e che rinvia a modalità di gestione precedenti. Intendo dire che evidentemente la struttura piramidale, da sempre tipica della SG, non ha trovato correttivi adeguati (i correttivi che a me era sembrato di individuare, ad esempio, nelle Divisioni) ed ha quindi consentito l'ascesa di alcune persone, l'isolamento e il rovesciamento di chi aveva portato avanti per anni una SG meno illiberale e più interessata al dialogo, al confronto.

In futuro sarà quindi opportuno tornare su questa tematica anche tenendo presente la forma assunta dalla SG, in cui il potere viene gestito da una minoranza su cui la base ha un minimo controllo. Inoltre: il legame, con il Giappone, visto da alcuni come un punto di forza, si è rivelato in certi casi come un momento di estrema debolezza, sia per l'impossibilità di un contatto diretto con il presidente internazionale, sia per le evidenti difficoltà culturali, che rendono più ardua la trasmissione di certi contenuti.

Perché è successo

Certamente alcune persone determinate possono tentare la scalata di un gruppo, di un'organizzazione, abbastanza facilmente: la società italiana pullula di possibili esemplificazioni a riguardo. Si tratta di fatti che non hanno risparmiato neppure note associazioni internazionali di tipo socio-caritativo, aduse al lavoro, ai contatti internazionali.

Sappiamo però tutti che non si può ragionare in termini di monocausalità, né che si può sostenere che sia sufficiente l'avere un manipolo o di gente ben determinata (in questo caso sarebbe stato determinante l'incontro tra presidente e direttore) per sovvertire dall'interno una vasta realtà: è inevitabile quindi interrogarsi su un insieme di concause che hanno concorso a determinare una situazione così complessa e sofferta.

Il legame maestro-discepolo certamente ha giocato, a mio avviso, un suo evidente ruolo: per mesi si sono accettati certi insegnamenti preferendo pensare a proprie carenze pur di non chiamare in causa il ruolo, lo status del presidente, del direttore, di altri responsabili.

Credo quindi che dovremmo interrogarci più a fondo su quelli che Schutz ha chiamato i «motivi causali», cioè i punti di partenza di un processo che si è posto, probabilmente, alcuni «motivi finali», alcune prospettive: probabilmente, un maggiore spazio a livello pubblico in Italia (fa parte del quadro la forte spinta sul

«reclutamento», su kosen rufu), ma anche un maggiore spazio a livello internazionale (non solo la Soka Gakkai Internazionale ma anche l'IBISG con rappresentanze in organismi internazionali significativi).

O forse, secondo altre interpretazioni, in questo clima politico italiano contemporaneo si dovrebbero avanzare ipotesi di altro genere: modalità politiche utilizzate su piano nazionale da Forza Italia potrebbero utilmente essere riscontrate all'interno della attuale conduzione dell'IBISG.

Come è successo

Bisognerà ancora interrogarsi in profondità sui mezzi utilizzati per questo tentato mutamento della SG italiana.

Secondo alcuni, si sarebbe tentata l'applicazione di strategie aziendali a un organismo di ben diverse finalità, in cui la logica di mercato è risultata di non facile applicazione. La marginalizzazione di persone con handicap, di giovani in difficoltà sul piano della droga, di omosessuali, soggetti a dure stigmatizzazioni da parte del presidente, potrebbero infatti rispondere a strategie di massimizzazione di manodopera e cervelli da convogliare in direzioni ipotizzate, additate dall'alto e che richiedono visibilità, efficienza, positività. Il marketing può essere intervenuto a sostenere con le proprie tecniche eventuali progetti di maggiore efficienza e competitività.

Una seconda ipotesi interpretativa può legarsi invece a un'impostazione altamente politica, come si è accennato: lo stile autoritario e verticistico inaugurato con forza nella SG risponde infatti a un più generale modo di conduzione della cosa pubblica in Italia oggi. Anche il paternalismo mostrato da alcuni dei massimi dirigenti trova riscontri oggi su piano politico in Italia e altrove. Lo stile di conduzione risentirebbe quindi dell'adesione politica e partitica di alcuni dei dirigenti implicati.

Risultanze e prospettive

Le risultanze, mi sembra, sono state molteplici. Negative e positive: le luci e le ombre di cui parlavo ne Il Buddha che è in noi (un'espressione largamente ripresa, oggi, nel dialogo interno) si sono decisamente approfondite, sono oggi più incisive, più marcate.

In negativo

- Si deve ricordare, in primo luogo, lo sconcerto, il dolore, la sofferenza profonda di molte persone: tale da non potersi cancellare con un colpo di spugna²⁵. La perdita di fiducia nei propri massimi responsabili: una parola usata, in questo caso, impropriamente. Il distacco è stato così brusco e doloroso in quanto è stato indotto da persone da cui ci si attendeva al contrario fiducia, comprensione, guide affettuose. Una associazione che promette felicità ha largamente donato infelicità, ansie, dubbi esistenziali profondi.
- Mostra crepe persino la figura, un tempo amatissima (troppo, come lo stesso Dobbelaere ha più volte sottolineato) del presidente internazionale Ikeda.
- In termini di associazione, questa ha visto molti dei più vecchi praticanti abbandonare le responsabilità, ritirarsi. Alcuni, in isolamento, con la perdita di contatti con gli altri membri. In totale, un calo notevole della consistenza numerica, e anche delle rendite dell'Istituto. Lo zaimu è infatti crollato; gli abbonamenti alle riviste sono precipitati.

- Si è verificato un forte degrado in termini di associazionismo, con l'espulsione o l'emarginazione di handicappati, di omosessuali, di persone con problemi di droga, ecc.
- Si instaurato un clima di sospetto tra i membri. Si è parlato di complotti, di traditori. Non ci si può più fidare dell'amico, del vicino.
- Soprattutto, si è verificata a mio parere una forte banalizzazione un impoverimento indebito del ricco insegnamento buddhista, non senza distorsioni di tipo dottrinale: un danno che credo potrà forse essere sormontato solo con un lavoro di anni.
- Ci sono tutte le premesse Perché l'IBISG acquisti una immagine pubblica deplorabile, legata ai metodi autoritari, alla chiamata in causa dei diritti civili dei membri: un danno del genere si rimonterà, eventualmente, con estrema fatica e durerà probabilmente più a lungo di quanto non dureranno le persone più responsabili di questa situazione.

In positivo

Non tutto, naturalmente, è stato negativo: anzi, credo che si siano avuti molteplici aspetti positivi Tra questi,

- Un rilancio dell'interesse verso questioni teoriche connesse con gli insegnamenti buddhisti; fa parte di questo quadro l'andare a rileggersi alcuni insegnamenti di Nichiren, l'approfondire alcuni aspetti, i tentare di studiare anche la storia della SG, l'operato del fondatore, Makiguchi, che ha subito il carcere per non abiurare da credenze democratiche.
- Il desiderio di confronto con altre scuole buddhiste: si va facendo strada la consapevolezza dell'importanza di non restare all'interno di una unica visuale, con il rischio di ignorare altre ricche elaborazioni e di non potere essere parte di proficui scambi teorici e dottrinali.
- La riaffermata consapevolezza della bontà del metodo proposto da Nichiren: il Gohonzon, la recitazione di per sé sembrano funzionare. E' la costruzione verticistica che vi si è sovrapposta, che oggi si rifiuta. Non il Sutra del Loto.
- Come conseguenza della conduzione degli anni 2001 e 2002 si potuta realizzare un'opera di contatti reciproci, di auto-organizzazione quale non si era mai verificata in precedenza. Sono fiorite iniziative spontanee, sono fioriti i confronti anche sugli insegnamenti: un fatto che mi sembra estremamente positivo.
- La volontà di andare avanti, il forte attaccamento e amore verso una SG un tempo diversa, ma che si ricorda e si riconosce come un luogo caldo di affetti, come una vera e propria comunità. Di qui l'intento di rifondare in qualche modo una SG che mantenga la positività di certi suoi tratti, in cui non abbiano spazio invece quei caratteri più legati alla gestione verticistica di potere che ne hanno permesso l'indebolimento, che sono state all'origine delle crepe che tanto ne hanno indebolito la consistenza, la solidità.
- Si tratta di un potenziale umano notevole, ricco di capacità, di volontà di ricostruzione e impegno di cui la SG potrebbe avvalersi e di cui dovrebbe, a mio avviso, fare tesoro, se non si intende incorrere in drastiche scissioni, con la conseguenza di un inevitabile ridimensionamento e perdita di centralità.

1

Tutte le citazioni qui di seguito riportate sono di persone che le hanno firmate. Ometto i loro nomi per svariate, comprensibili ragioni.

2

A Fine agosto del 2001 viene resa pubblica e comunicata la teoria del «complotto». Seguiranno nella prima parte del mese di settembre una serie di riunioni diffamatorie in tutta Italia sui supposti traditori (quelli che in realtà si erano rivolti al presidente internazionale).

3

Il chiedere guida é evidentemente un atto ben diverso dalla confessione in area cattolica: ma simile dovrebbe essere la riservatezza della relazione interpersonale occorsa.

4

La seconda volta nell'aprile 2002. In questi giorni (fine novembre 2002) il Consiglio è di nuovo a Tokyo.

5

Il 27 gennaio 2002 il Consiglio Nazionale Ristretto parte per il Giappone, da cui rientra il 2 febbraio avendo firmato la cosiddetta risoluzione di Tokyo. Il 13 luglio 2002 il Consiglio Nazionale delibera la pubblicazione della dichiarazione e di un articolo esplicativo sulla rivista interna «Il Nuovo Rinascimento» decisione da me molto caldeggiata: il tutto verrà fermato all'ultimo momento da Kaneda. Sempre in luglio si hanno lettere firmate da numerosi nuovi dirigenti in sostegno dei signor Kaneda e Littera.

6

Va detto che vi è gente che entra e gente che esce. Complessivamente si calcola che siano passate da Tracce circa 1200 persone. Poiché non tutti hanno un personal computer e chi lo ha e lo usa fa da punto di riferimento per altri, si calcola che bisognerebbe moltiplicare queste cifre per 4 o per 5 per avere un'idea più realistica dell'impatto di Tracce.

7

V. "Recriminazioni del signor G.": "Cara Macioti te m'hai fatto un danno/ a chiamarmi in dispregio un certo signor G/ perché adesso i membri e le membre, tutti qui/ mi chiamano direttore della Soka Gakkai/ e lo vedi, Macioti, m'hai messo te nei guai// Io non ho commesso torti,/ la sai la mia missione?/ è quella d'addrizzare i membri storti/ e te lo sai dove trovo onori? Nell smascherare i traditori/ Perché c'è Budda e Budda/ ma solo io so il pasticciare Budda.//..."

8

A proposito delle caratteristiche dei leader che formano la «nuova guardia»: "1) Sguardo nel vuoto quando parlano 2) Stupore malinconico 3) Uso frequente di frasi del tipo seguiamo il maestro (quale? Ikeda?) rimaniamo tutti uniti, studiamo il gosho e la N.R.U. (come se io fino ad oggi non mi fossi sforzato di farlo) 4) essere responsabili da capitolo in su 5) Tenere una posizione a prescindere (come diceva Totò) 6) Uso di frasi del tipo: "difenderò i miei responsabili fino alla morte" 7) Uso di frasi del tipo "non mi interessa tutto questo fermento, io vengo al centro SOLO PER RECITARE (come se il caos che sta

regnando non riguardi loro e i membri del loro capitolo, hombu etc.) EBBENE SE RICONOSCETE ALMENO QUATTRO DELLE CARATTERISTICHE APPENA CITATE NEL VOSTRO INTERLOCUTORE, SAPPIATE CHE E' STATO LOBOTOMIZZATO E CHE RISCHIA UN COLLASSO DIABETICO A FURIA Di MANGIAR PASTICCINI". Altri citano Mario Luzi, da "Micro Mega", a proposito di Antigone, con l'avvertenza: "Sostituire Antigone coi dissidenti e Creonte con Littera/Kaneda: il resto quadra tutto".

9

Dall'11 al 13 gennaio 2002 si ha una quarta visita di Hasegawa in Italia dal settembre 2001 quando ormai le autosospensioni di molti responsabili che dissentono dalle nuove linee sono ormai numerose. Dall'ottobre 2001 è istituito il nuovo Consiglio Nazionale Ristretto presieduto appunto da Hasegawa: la dipendenza dal Giappone è comunque solida.

10

Cfr. il n. 111-112, 1994-'95 de «La Critica Sociologica» con interventi vari illustrativi in termini quantitativi di un'inchiesta sulla SG. e il mio libro Il Buddha che è in noi, Germogli del Sutra del Loto, Seam, Roma 1996, testo ora tradotto in inglese e pubblicato in Usa con il titolo Te Buddha within ourselves, Blossoms of the Lotus Sutra, University Press of America, Lanham, New York, Oxford 2002 grazie alla traduzione di Richard Capozzi.

11

Il motivo dell'Itai doshin verrà riproposto con forza al corso estivo di Montecatini, 30 agosto, 1° settembre 2002, dal signor Kitano. Cfr. più avanti il paragrafo sulla «normalizzazione».

12

In questo caso, è bastato il veto di due persone. In altre circostanze, il Consiglio direttivo ha adottato come criterio quello dell'unanimità: che è difficile da raggiungere, visto che fanno parte del Consiglio gli stessi cui si imputano le grandi ambascie che vive oggi l'IBISG.

13

La costituzione in ente religioso è dell'Aprile 1998. All'11 settembre 1999 molti membri fanno risalire l'ascesa di Littera al potere.

14

Si tornerà più avanti sul tema dell'Intesa. Una informazione in merito può essere reperita in un trafiletto uscito su «Dharma, trimestrale di buddhismo per la pratica e per il dialogo» diretto da Maria Angela Falà, presidente dell'UBI, Unione buddhista Italiana, cui l'IBISG non partecipa. Nel n.11 del settembre 2002 si dice infatti che la Commissione Affari Costituzionali della Camera che sta esaminando le proposte di legge sulla libertà religiosa ha chiesto nuove audizioni, che si svolgeranno in autunno, ritardando quindi la discussione dell'articolato. Quindi la legge sulla libertà religiosa tarderà. Per quanto attiene invece all'Intesa, queste hanno concluso l'iter nella Commissione Interministeriale presieduta dal prof. Francesco Pizzetti e i testi sono pronti per la firma del sottosegretario con la delega per gli affari religiosi, Gianni Letta. Questa dovrebbe poi essere seguita dalla firma del Presidente del Consiglio Silvio Berlusconi. Attendono la conclusione dell'iter anche l'UBI e i Testimoni di Geova, che avevano già avuto l'approvazione nella precedente legislatura.

15

Ne riporto per brevità solo un'altra: "Dal momento che mi risulta ci siano anche delle denunce contro alcuni ministri di culto per i comportamenti lesivi della dignità della privacy di alcune persone (leggi diffamazioni e pedinamenti) se querelano la Macioti rischiano davvero di sollevare un putiferio. Tra l'altro, a meno di non considerare oggettivamente lesive le parole degli editoriali di Littera che la Macioti cita, a me sembra che di grave ci sia ben poco. Gravi purtroppo sono i fatti."

16

Mi giungono vari resoconti del corso estivo, in cui si accenna alle esternazioni del signor Kaneda in questo senso. Scriverò quindi una lettera al Consiglio direttivo, che aggiungo in allegato.

17

Si ricordi, tra l'altro, il recente *Global Citizen. The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*, uscito a cura di David Machacek e Bryan Wilson per i tipi della Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, volume in cui è presente il contributo da Karel Dobbelaere, *Toward a Pillar Organisation?* Insieme a uno mio sulla situazione in Italia *Buddhism in Action: Case Studies from Italy*.

18

Nella grafia della Soka Gakkai si omette la h nella trascrizione di Buddha e derivati.

19

A una lettera di critiche per il mio articolo avevo risposto spiegando che forse alcuni membri non avevano accesso a molte notizie, non conoscevano bene alcune situazioni. I dubbi sull'avviso di ripristino dell'Intesa sono venuti proprio alla persona con la quale avevo intrattenuto questo carteggio, stupita dall'avviso. Mi è quindi giunta una sua seconda lettera in cui mi scriveva che avevo ragione è proprio vero che i membri non hanno tutte le informazioni.

20

In data 1° agosto era uscito questo comunicato: "NOTA INFORMATIVA Alla Cortese Attenzione dei membri dell'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai presso le sedi dell'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai di Firenze, Milano, Roma, Torino, Genova, Bologna, Livorno, Cagliari, Grosseto.

A seguito dell'articolo a firma di Maria Immacolata Macioti lesivo dell'immagine dell'Istituto è stato sospeso l'iter dell'intesa con lo Stato Italiano." Il tutto è firmato per l'Ufficio Stampa Italia da Ambra Nepi. Poiché la rivista non era stata ancora distribuita nelle librerie, una decisione come minimo molto tempestiva. Nella stessa data Enzo Cursio scriveva al Presidente Sig. Mitsuhiro Kaneda e al Vice Direttore Generale Sig. Tamotsu Nakajima in merito all'Intesa: rallegrandosi per il buon andamento dell'iter e dell'atteggiamento favorevole rilevato presso la Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, ed esprimendo a Kaneda tutte le sue felicitazioni per l'esito positivo dell'istruttoria relativa all'intesa tra lo Stato Italiano e l'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai, che dovrebbe essere messo all'ordine del giorno in Consiglio dei Ministri per l'approvazione di rito tra la prima e la seconda settimana di settembre. Si tratta della stessa persona che un mese più tardi si alzerà a contraddire il presidente che al corso estivo dichiara di aver dovuto sospendere l'iter dell'Intesa a causa del mio pezzo e di molteplici interventi contrari.

21

Cfr. in n.11, Novembre 2001

22

Il nome Adua deriva dall'albergo in cui si erano riuniti alcuni membri, non in linea con Littera e Kaneda, a Montecatini.

23

Cfr. Macioti art. cit..

24

Grande sconcerto è derivato ultimamente dall'informazione che è circolata circa un supposto centro, definito da molti faraonico, che avrebbe dovuto aprirsi a Carsico in provincia di Milano: sarebbero starà già spesi 300 milioni per il progetto, che complessivamente sarebbe stato previsto in 30 miliardi. Il Corriere della Sera del 28 febbraio 2002 l'altronde aveva parlato di un ritiro da parte dell'IBISG. Cosa è accaduto? E perché si sono devoluti inutilmente tanto denari, mentre si dava parere negativo progetti molto più piccoli e ragionevoli? "I faraoni – scrive un membro su Tracce – a suo tempo erano più modesti. Con una visione ed obiettivi come questi, lo spirito del "buddhismo per la gente e soprattutto credo dovremmo chiederci tutti se è così che si fa kosen rufu".

25

Varie persone sono ricorse all'analisi. Tra i giovani entusiasti della conduzione Kaneda-Littera vi è chi mi ha scritto dimostrando fastidio per persone definite come piagnucolose, sempre pronte all'autocompatimento.

Appendix 6

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SGI - Italy. <<http://www.sgi-italia.org/index.php>>

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SGI - USA. <<http://www.sgi-usa.org>>

SGI - USA Library.

<http://www.sgi-usa.org/buddhism/library/SokaGakkai/Study/Temple/>>

Art of Living. <<http://www.sgi-uk.org/index.php/publications/aol>>

Buddismo e Società. <<http://www.sgi-italia.org/riviste/bs/index.php>>

Esperia Edizioni. <<http://www.esperiaedizioni.it>>

Il Nuovo Rinascimento. <<http://www.sgi-italia.org/riviste/nr/index.php>>

Il Volo Continuo. <<http://www.sgi-italia.org/riviste/ivc/index.php>>

World Tribune. <http://www.sgi-usa.org/publications/world_tribune/index.html>

Related Websites

Chris Holte. A vast collection of Nichiren Daishonin's writings, both official and apocryphal. A complete documentation on the "Temple Issue", the conflict between Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai. <http://www.geocities.com/chris_holte/>

Fiorediloto. Nichirenist Blog. <<http://fiorediloto/splinder.com>>

Marinaremi. Nichirenist Blog. <<http://marinaremi.blogspot.com/2006/11/ho-un-maestro.html>>

Nichiren's Coffehouse. A source of material on the various Nichiren's Buddhist schools. <<http://nichirencoffehouse.net/>>

Toride. Very accurate, although very critical towards Soka Gakkai.
<http://www.toride.org/edata/bbc.html>

Soka Addio. Dalle parole ai fatti: per lasciare la Soka e pensare finalmente ad altro.
 <http://it.groups.yahoo.com/group/soka_addio/>

Sokagakkai.it. Unofficial website.
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 <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/tracce2/>>